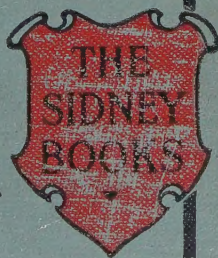
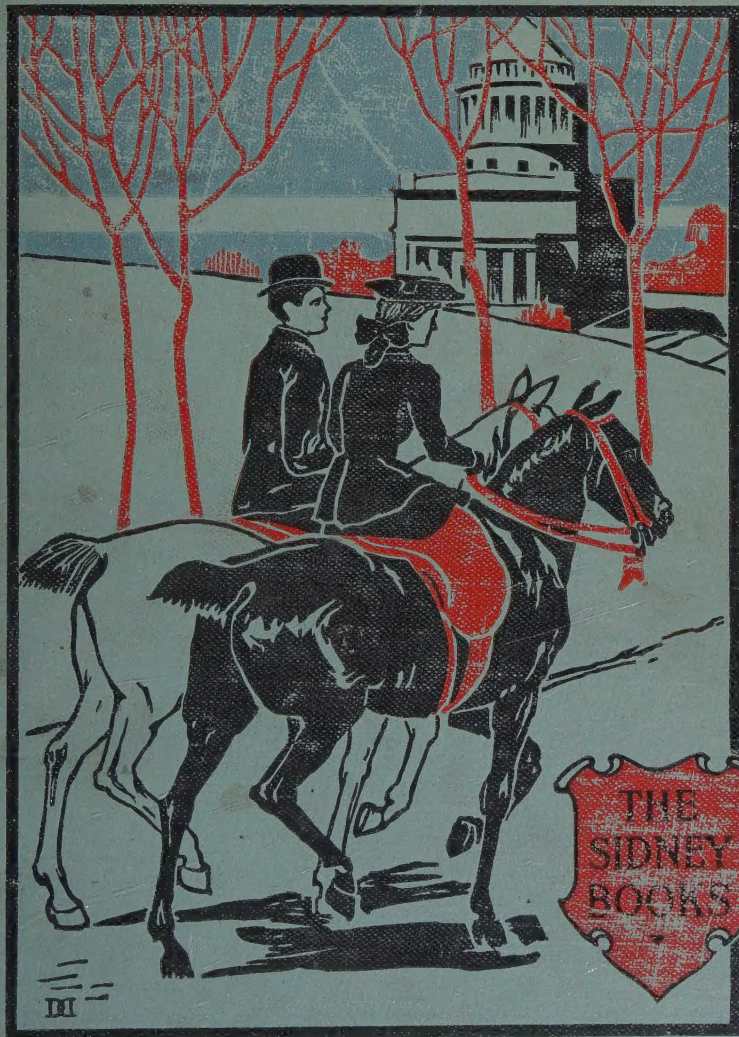
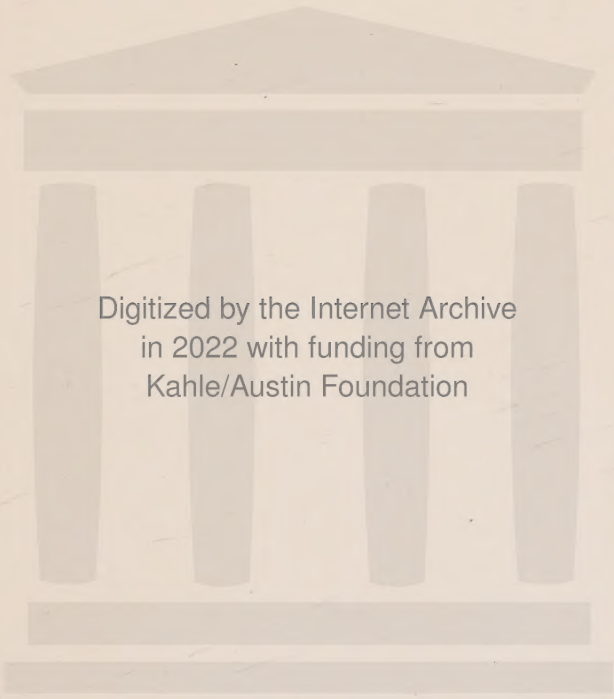


DAY HER YEAR IN NEW YORK



• ANNA • CHAPIN • RAY •

DAY: HER YEAR IN NEW YORK



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“For an instant he looked keenly down at her.” FRONTISPIECE.
See p. 233.

DAY:

HER YEAR IN NEW YORK

By

ANNA CHAPIN RAY

*Author of "Teddy : Her Book," "Phebe : Her Profession,"
"Sidney : Her Summer on the St. Lawrence,"
"Janet : Her Winter in Quebec," Etc.*

*ILLUSTRATED FROM DRAWINGS BY
HARRIET ROOSEVELT RICHARDS*

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"FOR AN INSTANT HE LOOKED KEENLY DOWN AT HER"	FRONTISPIECE
"DAY ROSE AND FACED THEM HOTLY" .	<i>Page</i> 75
"THE TWO FRIENDS STOOD LEANING ON THE EDGE OF THE AQUARIUM" . .	" 122
"‘I DO WISH I COULD DO THE THINGS YOU DO,’ DAY SAID, ENVIOUSLY" . .	" 239

DAY:

HER YEAR IN NEW YORK

CHAPTER ONE

“**I** AM so tired of doing the usual thing!” Day said.

From her corner where she habitually bent above her clattering typewriter, the elderly stenographer looked up with an ill-suppressed smile.

“When I die,” Day continued, half to herself, half to the surrounding walls of the office; “it should be written on my tomb that I fell sick of doing all the trite old things. Oh, dear, I wish he would come!” she added, with a great yawn which she made no effort to hide.

The stenographer’s eyes dropped back to her work, lest in their depths a lurking gleam should betray her amusement. Day Argyle’s vigorous young strength scarcely marked her as for a premature tomb; her dainty alertness and the happy curves of her scarlet lips gave the lie to her temporary repinings. Whatever its source, Day’s boredom was obviously but skin deep.

"You said he wouldn't be back for an hour?" she demanded, as she faced about suddenly. Then without waiting for the affirmative reply, she faced back again and fell to tapping impatiently on the sill of the open window, measuring the time of her taps to the click of the typewriter which had once more taken up its monotonous refrain.

Far down at her feet, so far away that its strident din was hushed to a murmur, the ceaseless tide of lower Broadway rushed through its narrow cañon, seeking in vain an outlet which, found, it would have disdained to use. Swirling throngs of foot passengers, long lines of heavy drays with their shouting drivers and cracking whips and creaking burdens, processions of street-cars whose curved and overhanging roofs, seen from above, converted them to the likeness of vast and active turtles, cabs darting to and fro in the crowd, seeking by ten zigzags to gain a foot of advantage over their heavier neighbours: all these formed an unceasing procession which forced itself upward, jostled at every point by a similar procession which came sweeping down from the upper end of the city. Now the tides met in two wholly distinct waves; now an eddy circled about some invisible obstacle; again the opposing currents mingled in a whirlpool which, starting from an inconspicuous centre, broadened until the narrow street from curb to curb was filled with a maelstrom which defied all progress. Sometimes a fallen horse was the centre, sometimes a careless pedestrian; but the end was

always the same, a whirling confusion which lasted for a moment only, then gave way to the opposing currents which once more flowed steadily, ceaselessly along their separate ways.

To Day, far above it all, for the most part it seemed a silent flowing. Now and then, as she leaned farther out the wide-open window, she could separate the din into its varying parts: the clang of the street-car gongs, the crack of the teamsters' whips, the beat of countless footfalls and the roar of many low-toned voices. It was a constant sort of din, rising and falling, but as unbroken as the human tide that gave it birth. Even to Day's young ears, it spoke of the restless human life that forgets to be glad for what it already has, lest, in its gladness, it neglect to snatch for that which it has not. And then, all at once, Day's face lighted. From far down among the roofs at her feet, though so far above the crowded street that they dominated its ceaseless din, there rang out the Trinity chimes, sounding the call to some mid-morning service.

The light still lingered in the girl's brown eyes, as she turned away from the window to greet the man who had stepped from the lift just outside the office door.

"At last!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were never coming. Where is Rob? He said he would be here ahead of me."

"He met Blanchard just now, and turned back with him. They were only going into Maiden Lane. What is the cause of this visit, Day?" Mr. Argyle

queried, as he opened the door of his private room, then stepped aside for Day to enter.

Day's cheeks dimpled.

"Devotion, Daddy."

With a mock sigh of resignation, Mr. Argyle halted half way across the room and drew out his check book.

"How much, this time?"

But Day caught him by the elbow, turned him around and peered up into his face.

"How mean of you, Daddy! Millions won't buy visits from me; and you needn't imply that I never come here, except when I want something."

"Then you don't want anything, to-day?"

"Not one single, solitary thing, except —" Day paused abruptly.

Mr. Argyle tossed his hat to the table, stuck his hands in his pockets and faced his daughter with the merry eyes of a half-grown boy. Beneath the boyish pose and the boyish merriment, however, there lurked the loving pride of a full-grown man. And Day, in all truth, was a fit subject for much pride, although her only real claim to beauty lay in her perfect health, her sunny temper, in her trim young figure and her brave brown eyes that danced and dreamed by turns. Just now, they danced.

"Except—" she jogged him, ruthlessly breaking in upon his adoring scrutiny.

"Well?"

"You don't sound at all curious, Daddy. You

really ought to help on my climax, not let it fizzle out like this," she admonished him.

As a rule, that room was sacred to the deeper schemes of finance, and nonsense was tabu. Nevertheless, —

"I am torn to mouthfuls and devoured by curiosity, Day," Mr. Argyle averred solemnly. "What is it that you want?"

"An idea." Day spoke the two words with weighty deliberation.

"Naturally," observed a voice from the doorway. "You generally do. May I come, Dad; or is this secret session?"

The next instant, the owner of the voice, big and blond and hearty, crossed the floor and seated himself on a corner of the table around which directors were wont to discuss the fate of a railway system that centered in New York and stretched its arms from southern gulf to northern lake and sea. To Rob Argyle, however, that fact mattered nothing. To his mind, a table was a table, and the mere detail that it served for board meetings made it none the less fit to support his sturdy self.

Day nodded blithely to her brother. Then she returned to the charge.

"And, as long as I knew it would be of no use to ask Rob for such a thing, I came in town to talk it over with you, Daddy."

"It?" Rob queried politely, while he dandled on his knees the stick which, together with a slight limp,

were all that remained of a football accident, two seasons since.

"The idea, of course."

Rob turned argumentative.

"How can you talk over something that you don't have?" he asked.

"The way you are always discussing your own merits," Day responded. "Do be still, Rob. I want to talk to Daddy. Do you realize, Mr. Argyle, that your daughter will be sixteen, next week?"

This time, her words produced an unexpected sensation. Mr. Argyle took his hands out of his pockets and stared at his tall daughter in unfeigned astonishment.

"Day! You don't mean it! It doesn't seem any time at all since you used to come down to desert and steal the sugar out of my saucer."

"It is several years, Daddy."

Mr. Argyle dropped down into his presidential chair and rested his chin in his hands.

"I suppose it is," he admitted. "Then my baby is really getting to be a young lady."

Day shook her head in violent dissent.

"No young lady about it, Daddy; only a great big girl. I hope you approve of her."

"Not so bad as she might be," Mr. Argyle said temperately. "Sixteen, next week! Dear me, Day; does your mother know?"

In spite of herself, Day laughed.

"I suppose so. I haven't meant to be sly about it."

"No. You couldn't well suppress the fact, I suppose.

Still, I confess it rather took away my breath. Sixteen! What are we going to do to celebrate?"

"That's where the idea comes in," Day told him.

From his seat on the corner of the table, Rob turned to stare inquiringly at the door. Then he lifted his brows and shook his yellow head. Day ignored his dumb show. Instead of heeding it, she rushed into her subject, headlong.

"I am tired of doing all the same old things with the same old people, Daddy," she burst out. "That's why I came in town to talk it over alone with you."

"Shall I depart?" Rob made meek query.

"No; you don't count," Day reassured him crushingly. "But it is mother who can't understand. She is a darling; but she can't see any reason that I shouldn't go on till the end of time, inviting people to parties so that they shall invite me back again, giving bangles and bonbons to Ruth and Boaz at Christmas and having them give me bangles and bonbons on my birthday. No; I just used the names for example. My real chums don't live in Hester Street. But, truly, I'm no Yankee; I hate to live by swapping. Think up something new for me, Daddy; or else let's not celebrate at all." Day paused abruptly to hide the little quaver in her voice, and her brown eyes were suspiciously bright.

Leaning back in his chair, Mr. Argyle surveyed his daughter in obvious perplexity. Surely, it was not the tale of years alone that proved her growth towards womanhood.

"Hasn't your mother any plans?" he asked slowly. "Usually she is the one to suggest such things."

"Yes." Day's tone rang disdainful. "She was going to give me a garden party, Alceste to cater and little enamel daisy pins for souvenirs. And the girls that would come have more pins than they know what to do with, and they'd all go and have some more garden parties and ask me to come to them. By the end of October, we'd all be just even, neither one of us owing the rest so much as a macaroon."

The perplexity was still manifest upon Mr. Argyle's face, as he queried, —

"What would you like to do, Day?"

Her answer, albeit unexpected, came with a promptness which betokened thought.

"I'd like to give a rousing good time to somebody who didn't expect it, and who couldn't pay me back, the very next day."

Rob slid off the table with a bounce.

"Bully for you, Day!" he observed approvingly.

"No," she objected perversely. "I'm no angel, Rob. I'm only tired of the other sort of thing."

Rob walked around the table to seat himself at her side. Then, bending down, he seized her and swung her up beside him.

"Never mind putting a name to it," he said coolly. "Let's plan who we'll have."

"Where will you have it?" Mr. Argyle asked, catching at the first concrete point that offered itself.

"Out at Heatherleigh, of course. You said, this

morning, that we were to stay a month longer. The only question is, what will It be?"

"Were you thinking of newsboys, Day?" Mr. Argyle tried in vain to keep the dubious note from his voice.

The quality of Day's laugh betokened the limitations of her missionary spirit.

"Never, Daddy! I believe in taking good things to them; but I never could see any sense in taking them to look at good things they can't ever so much as dream of having. No; I meant to ask somebody who would really enjoy Heatherleigh and appreciate it, and yet wouldn't turn right around and ask me somewhere else, somebody who would like to live just the way we do, if she only had the money to do it."

"Day," Rob said abruptly; "Sidney Stayre was to get home, last week."

Stopped in her eager tide of words, Day turned to look at her brother uncomprehendingly.

"Did she?" she asked, and the irrelevance of her verb betrayed her indifference. Sidney Stayre was a mere name to her, the friend of a friend she herself had chanced to make, the previous winter.

"Yes," Rob assented. Then he fell silent again; but not until he had received and answered a glance of interrogation from his father.

"What of it?" Day was still lost in her main theme, and her tone continued indifferent.

"I thought you said you wanted to know her."

"So I did; but there is plenty of time for that. I'll go to see her when we come back to town. Now

do help me plan for the seventeenth, Rob," Day besought him.

"Why not ask Sidney?"

Rob's arm was around her shoulders; but Day wriggled herself out of his grasp to stare at her brother as if she thought he had suddenly parted company with his wits.

"Sidney! Sidney Stayre!"

"Sure. Why not?"

"Why, because — because she isn't poor-folksy," Day answered promptly.

And Rob answered no less promptly, —

"No. Neither is she rich-folksy, either. That's no sign she wouldn't enjoy Heatherleigh, though."

"But she wouldn't come."

"Why not?"

"I don't know her."

"Time you did," Rob said calmly. "I'll take you there, any day you choose."

"Yes, call on her and ask her to come to my birthday party, all in a breath," Day made disdainful answer. "I don't know Sidney Stayre; but if she's the girl you say she is, she'd put me out by the back door."

"What for?"

"Because I was trying to patronize her."

"That's not Sidney," Rob objected.

Day snuggled back into the curve of his arm.

"You're a dear boy, Rob, and you know some things; but you don't know girls one bit. No mortal

girl with any snap to her would ever stand it to have a stranger walk into the house and invite her to a party, the first time they ever spoke to each other."

"Try it and see," Rob advised her placidly. "Sidney isn't a mortal girl; she's an immortally nice one."

Day laughed, in spite of herself, at the calm confidence in his voice.

"Not so nice as I am, Rob?" she wheedled.

"As nice as you. But honestly, Day, why don't you ask her? She is as nice as any girl in your set, and she doesn't have one-tenth as many good times. She would appreciate it, too. Go to see her, tomorrow, and ask her out to Heatherleigh, Day. You'll like her, I know; but, even if you don't, you owe her something for the way she stood by me, last winter," Rob urged, for, even while he spoke, there flashed across his mind the picture of Sidney Stayre hurrying to and fro to hasten his journey northward when word had come, one winter afternoon, that Day was halting upon the threshold of Death's open door.

All involuntarily Day's face softened, too. She knew the story well, knew it from Rob's frequent telling. And Rob was her other, better half. Perhaps she too owed something to this girl whom she had never seen.

"What do you think, Daddy?" she asked irresolutely.

Mr. Argyle had seen Sidney Stayre. His answer was not irresolute at all.

"I think you ought to go to see her, Day, for Rob's

sake and for Ronald's, too. Then, if you choose, you can ask her out to Heatherleigh, before we come back to town."

"If I'm going to do it at all, I may as well do it on the seventeenth," Day said bluntly. "I needn't tell her it's my birthday. But I can't see why she shouldn't come to see me, first."

Mr. Argyle sat with his eyes fixed upon the opposite wall.

"I should not imagine that Sidney Stayre was a girl to seek for friends," he said thoughtfully.

"She doesn't have to." Rob's answering tone was a trifle curt.

Strange to say, Day liked its curtness.

"I'll go, to-morrow, Rob, if you'll take me," she said, as she slipped to the floor and stood with one hand resting on her brother's broad shoulder. "We can see about Heatherleigh, when we get there. At least, I'd like to thank her for being so nice to you." Then, of a sudden, the earnestness left her eyes and she laughed. "But, Rob," she said, in mock dismay; "do you realize the responsibility you are taking? We may like each other, of course; but, after all that you and Ronald have said, the chances are that we shall fight like the cats of Kilkenny."

Rob bent down to disentangle a button from a lock of her brown hair. Then he spoke.

"I'll risk a row," he said benignly.

CHAPTER TWO

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, among the throng of men waiting for a blockade of streetcars to remove itself from the crossing in front of Newspaper Row, there was one who caught and held the attention of many of his neighbours. His distinction lay, not in any especial elegance of person or of dress, but rather in his whole carriage and bearing, in the erectness of his broad shoulders, in the unconscious ease of his stride, in the level intentness of his brown eyes. Women, as they passed by, turned to give him a second glance of approval. Elderly men stared at him with honest liking. It was plain to their maturer minds that a soldier's training had taught him a soldier's lesson: that the first duty of a masterful man is to learn to obey.

And, meanwhile, careless of all scrutiny, the young man stood, his hands in the side pockets of his short blue coat, glancing alertly this way and that to discover the earliest possible opening in the barricade of cars before him. For the most part, he paid scant heed to the people about him. Now and then he gazed approvingly after the bulky and dignified policeman who was seeking to clear a passageway for the impatient crowd; once he laid a steadying hand

upon the little old lady who stood on the curb beside him, an apple-cheeked old lady so weighted with years that one wondered how she chanced to be alone in that busy, dangerous corner of the New York bedlam. Then, without pausing for her thanks, he took away his hand and resumed his watch for an open cranny through which he could force his energetic way. His lips, as he watched, were shut in a tight, close line; but the brows above the level eyes were as smooth and kindly as the eyes themselves were honest.

One car had started forward, and another, and another. At last the whole line was in motion, and the waiting crowd surged forward sharply, regardless of the plunging horses of the truck which had been the first cause of the whole delay. The young man straightened his shoulders, threw back his head and then, yielding to the pressure of the crowd behind him, dashed forward to make the crossing before a second blockade should shut down over the busy thoroughfare. The next instant, he hesitated, stopped and glanced over his shoulder, his keen eyes searching the throng until they rested on the apple cheeks of the little old lady whose decorous straw bonnet, now wildly askew, seemed tossing to and fro upon the shoulders of the crowd. Ten strides brought him to her side, where he lost no time in putting his sturdy arm around her breathless little body.

"Stand away, please!" he gave curt command. "Don't you see you are half suffocating this lady?" And, heedless of her gratitude, he took her bundle in

one hand, her elbow in the other, and steadily, deliberately forced his way across the crowd, deftly steering his charge under the very noses of the fretting horses, between the moving platforms of the cars and among scores of elbows which never once collided with the black straw bonnet. As he landed her safe upon the opposite curb, his lips relaxed into a jovial smile.

"There you are, safe and sound," he said. "I hope they didn't trample you to death; but it's a worse crossing than a Saint Lawrence ferry in the ice." And, hat in hand, he returned her bundle, then vanished into the heart of the crowd.

Quite unknown to himself, his action had been watched and approved by a young girl who had stood near him while they waited for the line of cars to break. Once, just as he had anticipated her, she herself had made a hasty step forward to save the old lady from being capsized into the gutter; but her own movements had been impeded by a five-year-old urchin who wriggled madly about, seeking to detach himself from her restraining hand.

"Why aren't I able to walk by myself, Sidney?" he was protesting shrilly.

"Because you would get run over, dear."

"And hurted bad?" he pursued eagerly.

"Perhaps."

"And then would I ride in the p'leece wagon with the bell that makes things get out of the way?"

The youngster's realism was grewsome; nevertheless, his sister laughed.

"Perhaps," she said again.

"I mean the p'leece wagon with the red cross on the end of the seat and the p'leeceman in white clothes sitting on behind. What does he sit on behind for, Sidney?"

"To keep the passengers from tumbling out. Now, watch, Bungay. The cars are starting to move. Keep tight hold of sister's hand."

"But I don't want to hold hands. Your gloves feel so hot and squeezy. I'd rather hold your skirt," Bungay protested. "Wait! Si—i—idney, don't!"

For the opening had come and with it the rush; and Sidney had settled Bungay's preferences by summarily snatching him up in her arms and carrying him to the farther curb. Once safely there, she paused to rub her aching arms, while she gave an approving glance at the broad-shouldered man in whose wake she had achieved her own safe crossing.

"I like that," she said to herself.

Bungay, however, heard. Hearing, he appropriated the remark as being addressed to himself.

"So do I," he said amicably. "It's 'most as good as when Ronald used to carry me piggy-back, three-four years ago when we were at Auntie Jack's. You mussed up my collar more'n he did, though, and you squeezed my breakfast awful. Now let's go see my father. P'r'aps, if you ask him, Sidney, he'll give us some pennies so you can get weighed. I weigh forty-four and a half, so I'll take mine and get a song and some chocolates, 'stead of a weigh. Come on!"

And, tugging at her hand, he too vanished into the crowd.

It was a full half-hour later that they finally emerged from one of the tall buildings at the southern end of the row. Their errand had been completed in less than half of that time; but Bungay had insisted upon his hereditary rights to test the relative swiftness of the two lifts that pierced the heart of the building. Finding it impossible to decide between them, he had tested them again, and yet again. Then, just as he had been deposited at the street door for the third time, he had suddenly bethought himself that he had neglected to bestow a good-morning kiss upon his cousin whose office desk was tucked away in a corner of the top floor, and that, in the course of his daily duties, his cousin was likely to be cut off in his prime and go to the grave, unknissed. Accordingly, the long-suffering Sidney was dragged back again to the top of the building, only to find that the cousin had been sent to Fordham to investigate the details of a subway accident.

"And I never kissed him good-by," Bungay wailed, as he once more boarded the lift. "Now I guess Wade'll be sorry he won't let me kiss him till I get through my oatmeal mush."

But Sidney had her doubts.

By the time they stood in the shadow of the western approach to the bridge, however, the cousin was forgotten and Bungay was prancing excitedly before the long array of holes in the slot machine, trying to

decide which one was best worthy of receiving his pence.

"I'll tell you, Sidney, let's milk 'em all," he suggested hopefully. "I'll milk the first and you can milk the next, and when they squirt out what I want, I'll take it. Let's begin this end." And, before Sidney could stay his hand, the machine had clicked and a diminutive packet of chewing gum lay before them.

"Oh, Bungay! Throw it away!" his sister exclaimed in horror.

"For why?" Bungay gathered it in, as he spoke.

"Mamma doesn't let you put that in your mouth."

Bungay hesitated, as there flashed across his mind the remembrance of the flavour of laundry soap which had followed his last indulgence in the durable confection. Then he offered remonstrance.

"But it lasts twenty hundred dozen times as long as candy and doesn't cost so much. She'd like that. It's what she said when these clothes came home, 'stead of the velvet ones I wanted, only I didn't have curls to go with them. Oh, look at that dog! Sidney, look! It's just like Mrs. Ellison's Shags, and I do b'leeve that man is stealing him and carrying him off." And, before Sidney could lay a detaining hand on his arm, Bungay had gone dashing away through the great vaulted tunnel, up the stairs and out on the huge platform of the bridge-car station.

With a rush, Sidney was after him. She knew Bungay of old, knew that, once he was started on a quest, nothing short of force could stop him, knew

that such force must be applied promptly or not at all. As a rule, however, Bungay had been wont to behave with moderate caution in the thick of the down-town streets. The rule had been so unvarying that now its exception had taken Sidney wholly off her guard. Already Bungay's lusty little legs had won a goodly start. Up the iron stairway and out upon the platform Sidney went speeding after him. Now she lost him in the crowd; now she caught a distant glimpse of his sailor suit and scarlet cap. Now she gained upon him; now a knot of women, walking leisurely before her, barred her progress and gave Bungay fresh advantage. Then, just as a train drew up at the platform, Sidney caught sight of a stumpy brown tail following a pair of checked tweed legs into the rearmost car. The train quivered again, the conductor shouted warning and the car door banged together, but not until Bungay, with one flying leap, had landed in the aisle of the car, hard on the trail of the stumpy, waggling tail. The next instant, the train was slipping up the grade and out of sight.

For the space of a full moment, Sidney paused, aghast. She was breathless from her run, panting, and pale with fear. Bungay was self-reliance itself; but five is not a great age, and this was his first trip into Brooklyn. What adventure would befall him there? What would her parents say? Sidney was seventeen. Nevertheless, she swallowed hard for a moment, and shut her eyes. She opened them

abruptly. Two steady brown eyes looked into hers, and in her ears was a level voice, curt, but kind.

"Stay exactly here. I'll take this train across and look for him on the other side." And, with the echo of the words still in her ears, Sidney found herself staring after the broad shoulders of the same man who had piloted the little old lady from curb to curb.

With a bounce, a good half of her anxiety slid from her; but even with her relief was mingled an amused wonder whether this latter-day knight had any employment other than the rescue of hapless dames. Nevertheless, however much his lawful business might be left to shift for itself and suffer, it was impossible not to feel an instant reliance upon that steady voice. The girl proved it now by standing as if glued to the spot where he had left her.

By happy chance, that spot commanded a distant view of the returning trains, and Sidney's heart had scarcely ceased its wild bumping before a row of cars drew up beside the platform, a door swung open and out popped Bungay, smutty, but serene. Before Sidney could stir, he had spied her and was hailing her from afar.

"Hullo, Sidney! He wasn't Shags; but he might have been, and the man paid my fare both ways. You wait; I'm coming."

And, in an incredibly short space of time, he trudged up to her side, talking volubly while he came.

"It did look like Shags, and I knew Mrs. Ellison

would cry awful, if she lost him. He licked my face, and the man gave me a quarter 'cause I was a brave boy and didn't cry about it. He put me in the train to come home and gave me this book." Bungay flapped a ten-cent magazine by its rear cover. "It has pictures of lots of engines in it and a grizzly bear. And weren't you some s'prised, when you saw me going off on the train?"

And Sidney made fervent answer, —

"I should think I was."

However, long legs are swifter than short ones. While Bungay had been stubbing down the stairs and up again, another train had come in; before the engine had come to a full halt, a figure had leaped to the platform and now dashed along the pavement to pause at Sidney's side.

"So the little chap came back?" was the breathless question.

Calmly Bungay turned himself about.

"I ain't a little chap, and 'course I came back," he contradicted. "What for should I stay away?"

Wholly taken aback by this infantile dignity, the stranger cast about in his mind for a suitable reply. Bungay, meanwhile, stared up at him rebukingly. Then, of a sudden, his frown relaxed, and he threw his dignity to one side.

"Hullo!" he said affably.

"Hullo, old man!"

Again Bungay frowned.

"I ain't old man, and how do you do?"

"Quite well."

"I saw you once before," Bungay pursued, with renewed sternness, for it began to dawn upon him that the stranger was taking no steps towards renewing the acquaintance.

"Of course. Of course. Stupid of me not to have remembered it."

The heartiness was suspicious. Bungay impaled it upon the point of his next question.

"When do you think it was?" he demanded.

The two honest, accusing eyes, blinking out from the round and smutty face, were not to be deceived. The stranger confessed his ignorance.

"I'm sorry; but I really can't say."

"Then I'll tell you." Bungay lifted his arm, magazine and all. "It was three-four years ago, when we went to Auntie Jack's."

A sudden flash of recognition came into the stranger's eyes. He started to speak; but Bungay forestalled him.

"You were the man in the cap that told Sambo what to do next. You used to fix your collar in the looking-glass by the end of the car; and Sidney said —"

"Bungay!" The word popped from Sidney's lips with the force of a muffled explosion.

"That you must think you were a very handsome man," Bungay continued tranquilly; "and I told her 'yes, you were.'"

For a moment, the two young people stood facing

each other, their cheeks blazing, their very ears burning hotly. Then the young man's twitching lips opened to give place to a roar of laughter. Hat in hand, he bowed to Sidney.

"The little chap has a good memory, for sure," he said then. "I am Jack Blanchard, and I used to be conductor on the Quebec sleeper. I carried you down, last year; I remember now, though I didn't know you at first. I think you are Miss Stayre."

Sidney forgot her mirth in her astonishment.

"Yes. But how did you know?"

"I have a good memory for names, and yours was a little unusual. So is Bungay, for the matter of that, so it is no wonder that it brought it all back to me. What has become of the elephant?"

Sidney laughed again.

"Evidently you do remember us, Mr. Blanchard. Jumbo is the final proof."

"No; he isn't. He's in the checked ragbag," Bungay interposed; but, for the once, Sidney was deaf to the words of her small brother.

"I remember you took very good care of us," she said to Jack. Then she added, while, with a swift, frank gesture, she held out her hand to him; "and I am glad to be able to thank you for it now, as well as for the way you have come to my rescue here, to-day."

Jack Blanchard took her hand, while his steady eyes met hers in manifest and kindly approval.

"It was nothing, either time. Besides, I have another reason for being glad of the chance to look out for you. I think you're a friend of one of my own best friends."

Sidney glanced up expectantly.

"And who?"

"Argyle."

"Rob? Rob Argyle? Do you know him?"

Jack smiled at the change in her tone.

"Yes. I am in his father's office, and I suspect it was Rob who put me there."

"Tell me about it, please." As the girl spoke, she turned, with Bungay's hand in hers, and moved towards the street outside. "And tell me how you knew I knew him."

"I carried him down, when his sister was so ill," Jack said tersely, as he fell into step beside her. "He told me then how you had helped him off. Afterwards, he spoke of you often."

"Where is he now?" Sidney asked, as she halted on the curb.

"Still out at Heatherleigh. They'll be there for another month. You know his sister?"

Sidney shook her head. Then she signalled to a car. Then she turned back again.

"Once more, thank you," she said, as she offered him her hand. "And may I say something else? I saw you, this morning earlier, when you were helping the little old woman. I saw it, and I liked it."

As she spoke, she was watching him intently. She

was surprised at the sudden gentling of his keen young face.

"I've a little old mother of my own, back there in Canada," he said briefly. "I like to feel that perhaps some other chap will do the same thing for her." And, bowing again, he went striding down the sidewalk and vanished around a corner.

CHAPTER THREE

IN New York, space is not the only thing that makes distance. The Stayres and the Argyles lived scarcely half a mile apart; they were separated by the width of half a world. Nevertheless, the little house in the side street was not one whit less full of refinement than was the elaborate establishment on Madison Avenue just above Fiftieth Street. Both were homes; both possessed the too rare secret of knowing how to live for themselves rather than for what the world said of them. However, notwithstanding the likeness, the distance was great and Day had been wiser than she had realized, when she had decided to bridge it by way of Heatherleigh.

She found Rob awaiting her in the living-room, when she came out, after luncheon, that day. As she paused in the doorway before him, he heard the rustle of her skirt and glanced up with a quick scrutiny that swept her from head to heel and took approving note of her crisp piqué gown and white panama hat.

"How fine you look!" he assured her.

"Not too fine?" she queried, as she tossed across to him a spray of the honeysuckle that wreathed her bedroom window.

He caught it as it fell, put it in his buttonhole and smirked down at it rapturously.

"Not if you take care to remember that pretty is as pretty does," he cautioned her then. "What's the brolly for?"

Day glanced down at the white linen parasol in her hand.

"Æsthetics," she explained demurely.

"Rubbish, Day! It shows it's nothing but a whited sepulchre, used to dress up in when you want to put on airs. No girl who habitually carries a thing like that can show up any such coat of sunburn as you do. Cut it out, and let your peeled nose tell its own straight story."

With sudden anxiety, Day squinted down the bridge of her nose.

"Is it so very bad, Rob? I thought it was mostly over."

"So 'tis; all over. It covers your nose from stem to stern. What's the harm of it, Day? Anything is better than a milk-white damsel. If you're ready, stick the brolly in a corner and come along."

"But I want it, Rob. It's so pretty, and just matches my other things."

"All right. Only don't punch it into people's ribs, when you get on the car," Rob acquiesced, although he still eyed the offending weapon with extreme disfavour. "It's pretty enough, as far as that goes, and there's always the chance of a shower." And, without more ado, he led the way to the veranda

where the trap stood waiting to drive them across to the suburban station.

Day was uncommonly silent, during the half-hour ride to the city, and Rob, after one or two futile attempts to arouse her from her abstraction, fell silent in his turn. His boyish mind took things more simply. He had met Sidney Stayre, the previous winter, and he had liked her extremely well. By reason of Mr. Argyle's business, the Argyle family had spent the winter in Quebec, and Sidney Stayre had been a close friend of their own closest friends in Canada. Accordingly, when Rob's injured leg had sent him to New York for a month of special treatment, it had been quite a matter of course that he should come in contact with Sidney who had done her girlish best to make his stay a pleasant one. To neither Rob nor Sidney did it seem to count at all that the Stayre home was one of extreme simplicity, that Sidney, with her mother's help, was learning to cook her own dinners and make her own gowns, that she daily denied herself as luxuries things which to Day were commonplace necessities. Rob Argyle, boy-fashion, took Sidney as she was and liked her. Sidney's surroundings he accepted as a matter of course. Moreover, he was quite unable to see why Day should not do so likewise.

Day, however, was assailed by doubts. As a general thing, she was ready to accept Rob's judgment as final. Rob was far too loyal to Sidney to criticize the Stayre home; yet, from certain words

he had let fall, Day had her misgivings. Until her winter in Quebec, Day Argyle had had singularly little experience of homes ruled on other lines than her own. Her friends had been wholly from among girls who had no notion of the meaning of the word *afford*, girls whose lives slipped easily along well-cushioned grooves. Less than twelve short months before, Day Argyle had supposed that luxury and good breeding were synonymous terms, that happiness consisted in being denied nothing, save now and then, perhaps, by way of maternal discipline. By means of Quebec and of one Janet Leslie, she had learned her lesson to the contrary. Janet, wearing an unmistakable darn in her front breadth, had been as well-born, well-bred as Day herself. Day had doubted, had fought against the doubt. In the end, she had accepted it in its entirety.

Strange to say, Janet's independence, thrift and energy had unsettled Day completely. Without in the least realizing the part Janet had played in the shifting of her viewpoint, Day had come home, late in the spring, only to discover that the old life cloyed her. Seen in the light of Janet's originality, it seemed to her that her former friends were all doing the same things, thinking the same thoughts, wearing the same clothes, even. Now and then she caught herself wondering impatiently whether it was a sign of increasing breadth or increasing narrowness that she now appeared to herself like one of the dolls which, in her childhood, her old nurse had taught her to cut

in long strings from folded sheets of paper. A year ago, she would have accepted with enthusiasm her mother's suggestion of Alceste and the daisy pins. Now the idea palled upon her absolutely. With her sixteenth year, she would shake off the last of her childhood, and she preferred to mark the day in some less hackneyed fashion.

Nevertheless, she hesitated about Sidney Stayre. Janet Leslie might be the one exception that proved the rule; Janet's friend might well be of another sort. Day was not lacking in worldly wisdom. Long since, she had found out to her cost that it was much easier to get to know the wrong people than it was to get over knowing them. And Sidney might be wholly wrong, as wrong as her own street and number, only a block away from that of the woman who came to celebrate Mrs. Argyle's weekly mending day. To be sure, Rob liked her; but then, boys never noticed things. However —

Turning, she looked at Rob as he sat beside her, big and blond and broad-shouldered, and with such clean blue eyes, such happy curves around his thin red lips. He met her look with a smile; then, regardless of her wide white hat, he flung one muscular arm along the back of the seat and let his hand fall lightly to her farther shoulder. However, for Rob's sake, she would grit her teeth and like all things, even an unknown quantity such as this Sidney Stayre.

"Finkin'?" Rob asked her, in the vernacular of her own infancy.

And Day made impulsive answer, —

“Yes; counting my mercies. And the chief of them all is —”

But Rob cut in upon her phrase.

“Your best white broly. Well, pick it up and come along. Here we are at Forty-Second Street.”

The next moment, he had relieved Day of her burden and, sticking it under his arm, to the manifest detriment of its crisp white folds, he led the way out to the shrieking confusion of the city streets.

Granted the two extremes of slum and palace, the rest of the New York residence streets possess a strong family resemblance. Day's critical faculties were all upon the alert, as, with Rob at her side, she crossed to Fifth Avenue, turned northward, then turned again to the west. She knew the city well enough to be quite aware that she was passing out of the small world inhabited by herself and her friends; nevertheless, there was nothing socially incriminating in the look of the streets through which they were passing, and the brown-stone front, at which they finally halted, differed in no essential from divers other brown-stone fronts which hid from view the homes of her immediate circle of friends. To be sure, the lace curtains at the parlour windows had come from the department store rather than the importer's shop, and, on the floor above, the lace had degenerated into ruffled muslin. However, that was a mere detail, a detail no more insistent than was the almost aggressive cleanliness of both lace and muslin. Day's

quick eye took it all in at a glance, and she followed the glance with a nod of approval at Rob, as he touched the bell.

The next instant, she drew back, appalled at the vision which presented itself with a promptness that suggested a curious eye pressed to an open mesh of the nearest curtain. Such a vision as it was! A tall, lank girl of past fourteen, homely, awkward. Her thin brown hair was drawn tightly back from her freckled and spectacled face; her frock of dark blue muslin was half concealed beneath a great green-check apron, uncompromising of cut, but spotlessly neat. Cuffs of the same green-check protected her sleeves and threw into pitiless relief the overgrown hands, one of which held open the door, while the other still clutched a square of chamois which bore the unmistakable marks of household toil.

At sight of Rob, the girl's face lighted into surprised recognition, and she started to speak; but Day anticipated her, anticipated her with the level, meaningless voice devoted to formal calls.

"Is Miss Stayre in?" she asked.

The spectacles moved from Rob's face to that of Day. The eyes behind the spectacles changed from eager recognition to blankest astonishment and disapproval.

"Who do you mean? Sidney? Yes, she's at home."

In spite of herself, Day frowned at the crisp, curt answer. On one occasion, she had spent a week with

a remote cousin in an equally remote hill town. The cousin's household had been terrorized by just such another damsel as this, the daughter of a neighbouring farmer who felt herself above her place. Day's accent became a shade more haughty.

"Please give these cards to Miss Stayre," she said, as she held out the bits of pasteboard to the feminine Cerberus at the portal.

With frank curiosity, Cerberus bent her head to read the names.

"I don't need the cards," she said then. "I can remember, all right. But you needn't be too sure Sidney will see you."

The ice in Day's tone froze an inch or two thicker. She spoke with slow distinctness.

"Please be good enough to say to Miss Stayre that we are here."

This time, Cerberus showed his teeth, but in strange and unfamiliar wise.

"Miss Stayre your grandmother! I guess I'll call her Sidney, if I've a mind. Who do you think I am, anyhow?" she demanded vindictively.

Thoroughly angry, Day turned to Rob, to find him choking down his mirth as best he could.

"Oh, come now, Phil," he adjured the damsel, with what seemed to his sister a shocking familiarity; "don't get huffy; but go call Sidney, there's a good little soul."

"No use. She won't see you." The answer was uncompromising.

"Why not?"

"Too busy and too cross."

"What's she doing?"

"Trying to fit a dress that won't come right."

"Then whistle to her through the keyhole and tell her to let it go wrong," Rob gave cheery counsel. "Go along, Phil, and ask her to come down and see my sister."

The damsel hesitated, gave a sharp look at Day's face, another sharp look at Day's clothes, then she turned back to Rob.

"She told me she'd lock me into my room, if I disturbed her again," she said bluntly. "Still, as long as it's you, I don't know as she'll mind. You'll have to wait for her to get dressed, though."

By this time, Day's courage was wellnigh spent, spent, too, the force of her resolution to clamber over the barriers of her own exclusive set.

"No matter," she said hastily. "Rob, do you think we'd better —"

"Sure," Rob made easy response. "Go along, Phil. Never mind us; I know the road to the library." And he went striding through the hall with the manner of one who was treading upon familiar ground.

"Rob!" Day gasped, as soon as she heard the foot-fall of Cerberus retreating up the stairs. "What — what is that — that Thing?"

At her horrified question, Rob's mirth, but half suppressed, swept back upon him in full measure.

Dropping down into a venerable Morris chair, he rested his head against the back and went off into a spasm of laughter which, albeit noiseless, yet brought the tears to his blue eyes.

"Rob, hush! Do hush! She'll hear you," Day besought him in terrified accents, for her one brief parley with the damsel at the door had convinced her that, one cheek smitten, there would be no meek turning of its fellow for a second blow.

But Rob laughed on, with an abandonment of mirth which Day was far from sharing. She had been able to see but one of the elements of the picture. However humorous might be the pugnacious damsel, taken quite by herself, she gained an added, a doubled humour when viewed in contrast with Day's dainty, haughty self.

"What are you laughing at?" Day urged again, and, this time, her tone showed her annoyance. "Who is this awful being, Rob?"

And Rob steadied his voice just long enough to answer, —

"That's Phil."

"Who is Phil?" Day demanded shortly.

"Phyllis Stayre."

"Rob! That thing! A Stayre?"

"Yes. She is the second one."

"You don't mean it!" Day cast a horrified and hurried glance about the room, as if she feared lest other and similar Stayres might be lurking in unseen corners. "Is Sidney like her?"

Rob's answering tone was more reassuring than his phrase, —

"Just wait and see." And, suiting the action to the words, he settled down an inch or two lower in the shabby Morris chair.

"I suppose we'll have to," poor Day admitted gloomily. "Is this one crazy, Rob?"

"No; just queer. She'll get over it in time; she's bright enough. But just now she is in the stage where she thinks it is rather smart to pose as the Ugly Duckling; she'll cut her wisdom teeth, some day," Rob predicted placidly. "I was hoping you'd see her. She doesn't always show herself. What do you think of her, Day?"

Day shuddered.

"Terrible! Do you suppose she will come back?" Uneasily she looked over her shoulder. "But you never told me about her, Rob."

"Couldn't," he said, laughing.

"Why not?"

"Words couldn't do her justice. Besides," he sobered a little; "it wouldn't have been fair to Sidney."

But Day held up her hand.

"Hush!" she whispered. "I hear her coming. Do speak to her, Rob. I don't dare."

Rob nodded reassuringly; but Day's eyes were still full of alarm, as she faced the door, braced in her chair, meanwhile, as if to receive another onslaught. Then of a sudden the fear left her eyes, and she found herself on her feet, her hand extended and her poise

alert with pleasure. In place of the pugnacious, checked-gingham Cerberus, there had come hurrying down the stairs and into the room a tall girl of seventeen, slim and graceful, her eager face alight with pleasure and both hands held out in glad greeting.

"Rob! What joy to see you look so well! And this is Day? I can't call you Miss Argyle; Rob has talked of you too often, and I'm used to the other name. How good it is to see you! Do sit down." And, with swift dexterity, Sidney drew three chairs into a cozy group and popped Day down into the easiest of the three.

Like most girls of her age, Day received impressions swiftly. Unlike most girlish impressions, however, those of Day were fairly permanent. In all her after years, years when her friendship for Sidney Stayre was ripening to its best maturity, she never quite lost the memory of her first picture of Sidney, of the strong and happy face, of the tall, slim figure in its simple gown of cool gray linen touched here and there with a dash of tawny yellow. To Day, watching and leaping to swift judgment, it seemed that Sidney's character was like her gown, cool and firm and dainty, and dashed with brilliancy withal. And then, just as the girl's critical sense was fast leaving her and she was about to give herself over wholly to her hostess, she heard Sidney saying to her brother, as she took away his hat and stick, —

"And, best of all, Rob, you're getting to where you carry this for ornament."

The words were nothing; but the tone, and the look in the keen brown eyes won Day's heart completely. This was the Sidney of whom Rob had so often talked, kindly and strong and heedful of the weakness of others. Ten minutes later, in a pause of the rapid talk, Day found herself wondering why she had not made this call, four months before.

"And you really want me to spend two nights at Heatherleigh?" Sidney said, as her guests rose to go away. "I'd love it of all things. It seems as if I couldn't settle down in the city quite so soon. This will give me another breath of outside air."

"If you are very anxious about it, you might bring Bungay," Rob suggested.

Sidney laughed.

"Fate forbid! I've had my fill of his society for the present. By the way, he led me into an adventure with a friend of yours, this morning."

"A friend of mine?"

"Yes. He said his name was Blanchard." And Sidney rapidly sketched the outline of her morning's experience.

Rob listened with manifest approval.

"Good old Jack!" he commented at length. "That's exactly like him, too, always looking out for some one else. What did you think of him, Sidney?"

"I thought he was a dear," she answered, with the quick enthusiasm which seemed so characteristic of her. "Next time you come, you must tell me all about him."

"Next time I come," Rob rejoined; "I'll bring him with me, if I may, and let him speak for himself."

"Bring him, of course," Sidney assented promptly. "I'd like to see him again."

But Day broke into their dialogue, suddenly and somewhat to Rob's surprise.

"So glad you feel that way about him, Sidney. You said he was coming out to dinner on the seventeenth; didn't you, Rob?" she asked calmly. "You'll see him then. And it's all settled that Rob is to call for you, the sixteenth, and bring you out to Heatherleigh." And, nodding a friendly, informal good-by, she led the way down the steps.

Once safely in the street, she tucked her hand into Rob's arm.

"Rob Argyle," she said rebukingly; "do you realize that we have stayed in that house two mortal hours?"

Rob Argyle was no woman. Nevertheless, now he stuck his hands, stick and all, into his pockets and addressed the opposite house.

"I told you so!" quoth Rob Argyle.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMER lingered late, that year. Nevertheless, the torrid glare of a September afternoon was powerless to render Heatherleigh uncomfortable. The great gray bungalow sprawled over the grass and among the rocky ledges which border the northern edge of the Sound just outside the twin light-houses which mark the entrance to the New York channel. Behind it lay extensive lawns, spotted with the paraphernalia of outdoor sports, for Rob Argyle had been an enthusiastic athlete until football had cut him off in his prime and driven him to seek with Day the milder joys of golf and croquet. Mr. Argyle still played a vigorous game of tennis and, this last spring, Heatherleigh had swarmed for a week with a small army of men rushing to completion the nine-hole links where Mr. Argyle and his son and heir nightly strove for mastery. At the left of the lawns, a thicket of young trees hid the stables; at the right, the elm-bordered gravel drive led to the village, half a mile away.

The house itself occupied the whole of its own rocky point, and, before it, the ledges led down, step on step, to the very water's edge. One of the tiny packing boxes commonly known as seashore cottages

could have been set down inside the great, shady veranda; another could have found place within the living-room which was all windows and fireplace and many-angled, lofty ceiling. Behind the living-room, two long hallways led off at sharp angles, one to the wing where the family bedrooms faced the eastern sea, the other past the dining-room and butler's pantry to the kitchen and the servants' wing beyond the shielding wall of the thicket. Seen from afar, the irregular gray roofs, the shingled walls and the chimneys of brown rubble seemed a natural part of the lichen-covered rocks on which they rested.

Out on the lawn, the sun was blazing fiercely down, and the white disks of the clock-golf caught the light sharply and blazed with answering gleam. Up on the veranda, however, there was a grateful shade, and the sea-breeze swept across it from end to end, fluttering Day's muslin skirts and ruffling her hair into a vivid halo about her eager face. On Day's knee rested an open book; but Day's hands were crossed at the back of her head, and she lay back in her chair with her eyes fixed upon the distant vista of the elm-arched drive, watching for the first glimpse of her coming guest.

"Let the child have her way," Mr. Argyle had bidden his wife, the night after Day had revealed her plan for her remarkable birthday party of two.

"But I have never seen the girl," Mrs. Argyle made natural objection.

"Rob has," her husband reminded her.

"I know, and I am grateful," Mrs. Argyle assented quickly. "I've no doubt of her being fully their equal in character. So, for the matter of that, is Jack Blanchard. Still,—"

Her husband looked up, caught her eye, smiled and nodded. Then he took up her interrupted phrase.

"Still, you mean, they aren't exactly of our own set. I know they aren't; and yet —" In his turn, he left the phrase in suspension.

"And yet?" his wife urged on his lagging speech.

He roused himself, rose to his feet and began pacing the floor.

"And yet, I suspect they are fully the equals, not of our own children, of course, no parents would willingly admit that; but of our children's friends. I have seen Sidney; I know Jack from start to finish. It is my private impression that, in mind and manners and morals, they're head and shoulders above the Paris dolls and the manikins who go to Rob's parties and Day's dancing class. They may not have so much money nor such excellent clothes; but they have something better, good red blood and a wholesome mind. That's what we need, here in New York, nowadays."

"I know," his wife agreed. "And yet, one can't forget that Jack Blanchard—"

"Who wants to forget it?" Mr. Argyle interrupted her. "It was the manliest thing the fellow could do. For that matter, my own grandfather, over there in Scotland, used to shoe the doctor's horse and then

rub him down, in payment for the right to mess in the surgery. The fellows who work are the fellows who count. Rob never would have been half the man he is, if he hadn't struck up this friendship with Jack Blanchard."

Mrs. Argyle shook her head, and doubt lay heavy in her eyes.

"For now, yes. But what about the future?"

"The future can take care of itself. Ten years from now, Blanchard may be director of a dozen railroads, and Rob may be keeping books in the office of one of them. It is impossible to read on the cards quickly enough to do any good, when American business hands are shuffling the pack. Let the future see to itself, dear, and, meanwhile, do your best to make Day's birthday all the child dreams for it. For my part, I like her spirit in cutting free from the trite old lines." And Mr. Argyle, pausing behind his wife's chair, tilted up her face and dropped upon it one of the caresses which still remained from their honeymoon, a round score of years ago.

And now Rob, with Sidney's suitcase in his hand, was leading the way out one of the interminable walks of the Grand Central Station. Behind him Sidney, in her shaggy brown pongee frock and wide brown hat, kept an alert eye upon her escort, noting with friendly interest that he was fast outgrowing the old-time limp left from his strain, and, meanwhile, taking a girlish satisfaction that, on the whole

length of platform, there was no one who could be compared to Rob Argyle. To be sure, Sidney was inclined to be partial, especially upon a day which was bidding fair to bring her so much of happiness. Nevertheless, to a most critical eye, Rob Argyle would have held his own in any crowd.

Seated in the train, with the suitcase tucked away under their feet, Sidney turned to Rob almost at once.

"You were going to tell me about Mr. Blanchard," she reminded him then.

Rob waved a dissenting hand to the boy who was poking a purple box of Huyler into his face.

"What is there to tell?" he asked evasively.

Sidney rested the toe of one brown suede shoe upon the suitcase and stared down at the combination intently. The shoes had been the long-coveted gift of a recent birthday; nevertheless, just now, her mind ignored them completely.

"How you happened to know him so well," she said at length.

"Why not?"

"He told me he had been a Pullman conductor," Sidney reminded him demurely.

"Well, what of it?"

The girl lifted her eyes and flashed upon her companion one swift glance of mingled amusement and approval.

"Nothing; only you didn't always feel that way."

To her surprise, Rob coloured hotly. Then he sought to justify himself.

"Oh, come now; I'm not an out and out snob," he said defensively.

"No," Sidney made honest answer; "you aren't. I only used to be afraid you would be."

He coloured again, and his dark blue eyes, fixed on the vistas of fluttering clotheslines which opened out along the track, showed that her words had hurt him more than he would have cared to admit. Sidney caught the look, interpreted it aright and, after her own straightforward fashion, made prompt expression of her penitence.

"Don't misunderstand me, Rob, and take me all wrong," she said directly. "Perhaps I only meant to tease. Anyway, I spoke before I thought. But you do know," and her laugh was so cajoling that Rob laughed too in sympathy; "but you do know you used to be very finicky about your friends."

To her surprise, the laugh died quickly out of Rob's blue eyes, and he answered with an earnestness which made her heart give a sharp throb of admiration,—

"Perhaps. But I think I am a good deal more finicky now, and that is the reason I am so glad to hang on to Jack."

"Tell me all about him, then," Sidney urged, in a tone which reflected something of his gravity. "Is he the man you wrote about, the man who took such care of you, when Day was ill?"

Rob nodded, while, for a moment, his eyes looked beyond the long ranks of white brick walls to the snowbound Canadian fields, to the icebound Cana-

dian river which, fields and river and snow and ice, all had seemed leagued together to prevent his journey northward to the distant city where Day was lying at the point of death. These formed the background of the picture. Before them, dominating them at every point, was a broad-shouldered young man in blue, beneath whose visored cap a pair of keen brown eyes looked steadily, kindly into Rob's own. He roused himself with an effort.

"That wasn't all," he answered Sidney. "I had seen him twice before, once when I first went up; and I had liked him at the start. That day, though, he told me about himself. You know we were twelve hours late, and I was the only passenger, so we were bound to be friends or foes, before we landed. At first, I couldn't make him out; he wasn't like any Pullman conductor I had ever seen before. Later, I understood. His father was a retired army man, captain, I think. This only son was in one of those little Canadian universities, when the Boer war broke out. As a matter of course, he went out with the first contingent. He brought home a couple of medals and a scar in his leg, and, up to the day before he sailed, he expected to go back to finish his course."

"Why didn't he?"

Sidney's practical question broke in upon the memories which were sweeping over Rob once more. He was telling it badly, baldly. It all had seemed so tragically real, heard from Jack's own lips. For Jack's own sake, Rob wished he had left him to tell

Sidney the story, only Jack, as a rule, saw no need of focussing attention upon himself.

"Because his father had died. He had been very ill, an operation and two nurses, and there was no more money, not even for the mother. Jack sailed for England, next day. The same night he reached England, he took steerage for home; the day after he reached home, he took the first work that offered itself. He did it well, too. After my father had arranged for his coming home with us, one of the men up there tried to bribe him to come back, told my father that Jack was the best all-round man who had ever run into Quebec."

"And now?" Sidney queried.

While Rob had been speaking, she had sat with her eyes fixed intently upon his face, watching his earnest, eager absorption in his theme. For the time being, however, Rob Argyle was wholly oblivious of the girl at his side; his whole mind was upon Jack, and Sidney was of no more personal account than is the corner post-box wherein one drops his letters.

"Now he is climbing up my father's office, and winning the liking of the very men he is climbing over," Rob said tersely.

Sidney frowned in sudden disapproval.

"I don't like that," she objected.

Rob corrected his phrase.

"Climbing past, I ought to say. He holds out a helping hand to every man he passes on the road."

Rob fell silent, and Sidney drew a long breath.

Then, turning slightly, she rested her elbow on the window ledge and bent on Rob a thoughtful gaze.

"Rob," she said slowly at length; "you've grown a lot. You see straighter, too, than you used to do. Who opened your eyes?"

But already Rob had dismissed his earnestness and had returned to his usual jovial self.

"Grewed; have I?" he queried gayly. "Perhaps I took a boost from knowing Ronald Leslie."

And you, he longed to add in perfect truth. Nevertheless, Rob Argyle was shrewd enough to know that even truth like that would be too direct for a girl like Sidney Stayre. Instead, he picked up his stick and stooped for the suitcase, for the train was slackening its speed and, far away to the right upon its rocky ledges, the gray walls and brown chimneys of Heatherleigh were just coming into sight.

"I do think this is the most perfect day I have ever spent," Sidney said contentedly, the next night.

Out of deference to the full moon which was laying a golden trail across the restless waves, dinner had been served early, that night; and now, though the west was still blazing with the afterglow, the Argyle yacht was already far out in the mid-channel, beating lazily to and fro before the light evening breeze. The day had begun early, and it had been filled to overflowing, pleasure following hard upon the heels of pleasure from the moment when the bundle-laden breakfast table had brought to Sidney her first intimation of Day's especial claim upon the day.

No matter who might be their guests, the Argyles never deviated from certain long-established customs. Each family-birthday breakfast was eaten from flower-wreathed plates, each place at table received its own souvenir of the day.

"We give each other presents, you see, so they'll be sure to be glad we were born," Day had made infant explanation to one mystified guest. "They might not think so much about it, unless we reminded them, every time."

But Sidney Stayre, that night in her own room, confessed to herself that there would have been no need of the pink paper parcel beside her own plate to make her glad that Day was born.

From breakfast, they had gone directly to the tennis court where the game was wellnigh spoiled for both the girls by Rob's need to stand aside and act as referee.

"Too bad; isn't it?" Day said to her adversary, in a swift aside delivered across the net. "But you know he was one of the best football players they've ever had at Exeter."

And Sidney nodded. She too had had a kinsman at Exeter. She too had heard the tales of Rob's great prowess. Unlike Day, however, she was loath to believe that past glory, no matter how great, could make amends for present deprivations. It was now almost two years since Rob Argyle had gone down in the heart of a scrimmage. For six months of that time, Sidney Stayre had known him; yet even

now she could not watch with careless eyes the little limp which still remained to remind him of that fall.

The three-seated surrey came around, that afternoon, when it was time to go to the station, and the three young people were waiting for it, as it drove to the veranda steps. Rob lost no time in stowing Sidney away on the back seat.

"Day can look out for Jack," he explained, as he took his place at Sidney's side; "and my father always wants to drive home, himself. Sic 'em, James! I hear the whistle." And, the next instant, their ears were full of the hum of the grinding gravel.

From over her plate, Sidney eyed Jack keenly, that night. All in all, he bore her scrutiny well. To be sure, after her own experience of his kindness, after Rob's story of his sturdy, independent pluck, it would have been impossible for her to have viewed him with unfriendly eyes. Nevertheless, as they left the table, Sidney told herself that Jack Blanchard would be worth the knowing. Even beside Rob Argyle, he held his own completely. Never were two young fellows more different to the outward view. Nevertheless, Sidney Stayre, knowing one of them and watching the other intently, was assured that at heart they were next of kin. Rob would be always Rob; but, on many a point, Jack would prove himself Rob's foster brother. It was with a cordial smile of welcome that she pulled aside her skirt to make room for Jack, as they took their places in the yacht, a half-hour later.

They lingered long out on the water, lingered until the last of the evening boats had passed them and vanished down the Sound. At last, however, Mr. Argyle set the sail for home. For one reason or another, they talked little, as the boat turned her back to the moon and danced over the tumbling waves towards the distant lights of Heatherleigh. Side by side in the bow, Rob and Sidney watched the water sliding darkly past them, watched the long ribbons of light that came stretching out as if to bind them to the shore. All of a sudden, Rob began whistling softly to himself and, an instant later, humming low, Sidney took up the refrain. Together, they finished it to its very end. Then Rob asked, —

“You know it, too, Sidney?”

She nodded.

“Ronald taught me.”

“Good old Ronald!” Rob’s voice was full of quiet enthusiasm. “Don’t you wish he were here now?”

And, meanwhile, Mr. Argyle was asking, under cover of the sound of the splashing waves, —

“Well, Day, has it been a success?”

And Day’s answer came back to him full of dreamy content, —

“Beautiful, Daddy. Next year, we’ll do it all over again.”

But Jack, at her other side, was heedless of her words. For the moment, his whole mind was fixed on Mrs. Argyle who, obedient to some womanish instinct, was speaking to him of his mother.

CHAPTER FIVE

AT fourteen, Phyllis Stayre had her mind so fixed upon the reformation of the world that she neglected to question whether there was any room for reformation in her own self. Moreover, she went at the matter of reformation with the same uncompromising hands that tugged her brown hair away from her freckled face and tied it with a tight knot of the blue ribbon which by rights she should have avoided. Had she been quite frank with herself, Phyllis would have acknowledged a passionate love of beauty for beauty's sake, an almost passionate regret that it had been denied to her. Instead of acknowledging, and of making the best of what few good points had fallen to her lot, poor Phyllis seemed to take an obstinate delight in uglifying herself to the utmost possible degree. She dressed in dull browns and muddy blues, cut in unlovely and utilitarian lines. Ruffles, she said, made her nervous, and it was too much trouble to fluff her hair and keep white things in her sleeves. She could spend her time, she averred, in more profitable fashion. In a family such as theirs, some one must do the practical things. Then, with an accusing shake of her duster, she vanished from the room, leav-

ing Sidney, trim and dainty in her simple gown, to rearrange the furniture and ornaments, which looked as if they had been swept about by a cyclone.

"I don't see, myself, why it is necessary to look a fright, because you are useful," Sidney protested to the empty walls.

Phyllis reappeared upon the threshold.

"You had three clean shirtwaists come out of the wash, this very week," she retorted.

"Certainly."

"Well, I can't, then. It's not right to put so much on Mary."

Sidney removed the Rookwood pitcher which, for the convenience of her duster, Phyllis had set on top of the clock and neglected to take down. Then she crossed to the table, put the cover right side up and broke off the threads left dangling from Phyllis's recent snapping.

"I feel I must wear plain, dark things that don't want washing, every other minute," Phyllis repeated virtuously, though with an angry eye upon Sidney's reconstructive measures.

"And I feel as if I'd rather have the dirt show, so I can tell when it needs washing off," Sidney made tranquil answer.

"That's all very well for you; but what about Mary?" Phyllis demanded, in a tone befitting the founder of a working girls' protective union.

And Sidney once more made tranquil answer, —

"I always wash the Monday morning dishes, and I iron my things, myself."

Phyllis sniffed.

"You can do as you choose. For my part, I think there are more important things in life than ironing frills and furbelows."

"What?"

But Phyllis fled, rather than reply to the impassive question.

There were seven young Stayres, with Sidney and Phyllis at the top of the flight. Only the accident of years and parentage could ever have brought the two sisters into contact, however; and, for the most part, they went their separate ways. When they met, Phyllis was in the likeness of a psychological hedgehog; but Sidney had the good fortune to be endowed with a sense of humour sufficient to cope even with such a problem as that afforded by her young sister. She treated Phyllis and her whims as an embodied joke, and parried her quills with a good-tempered laughter which left the domestic porcupine in a mood of speechless indignation.

From these one-sided contests, Sidney always emerged with unruffled calm. Long since, she had dismissed all feeling of responsibility for the vagaries of her younger sister. Her fourteen years' experience had taught her to accept Phyllis as an established fact, a law unto herself, unmodified and unmodifiable. On most similar points, Sidney Stayre's conscience was acute; but Phyllis she left to go her ways in peace.

As a rule, Phyllis's way was a lonely one. The girl made few friends; she was intimate with no one of the circle of her own kin, save for her dreamy, unpractical father whom she loved with the whole passion of her girlish nature. She coddled him and fussed over him with an almost maternal care, she made good his absent-minded omissions and, whenever he was mentioned, she adopted a defensive tone as grotesque in its over-zealous loyalty as in its needlessness. Had the sole impression of Mr. Stayre been gained from the utterances of his second daughter, there would have been a wide-spread theory that he was an ill-used and henpecked man, and not, as in fact he was, the spoiled idol of the entire family. Phyllis fought for him, and hunted up his neckties when he pulled them off, late at night, to serve as markers for his bedtime books. Nevertheless, it was Sidney who had made the neckties in the first place, deftly fashioning them from the unworn fragments of her mother's old black silk frock and contriving to endow them with the hall mark of a famous haberdasher.

The Stayres next below Phyllis chanced to be two boys. Tom, the older, was a delicate and dreamy boy, his father's child for whom, illogically enough, Phyllis had scanty patience. The younger one, a healthy imp of eleven, had long since taken his older sister as his own chief joke, and rendered her life a burden to her daily. Just why the parental Stayres had christened this urchin Nathan, it would be hard

to say. Certainly the ancestral deacon whose name he bore, would have squirmed in his grave, had he seen this recent bud upon the family tree. Nathan he was in theory only, however; but not in fact. Sidney's first horrified sight of his infant nose had led her to dub him Pugs, and the name had clung to him, to the utter exclusion of the more orthodox *Nathan*. Pugs accepted it all, his own personality included, as a part of the world-wide joke of things which he was prone to regard as having been created for his own special delectation; and his first day of school life had been marked and marred by a fray with his teacher who had declined to accept *Pugs* as a suitable and sufficient name, and had sent him home in search of something more befitting her official register.

Below Pugs were twin girls, while Bungay brought up the rear and closed the long column of the family record under the wholly unused name of Maurice. Such was the Stayre family; and it might have been supposed that it would have crammed to the full the narrow limits of the brown-stone front. Nevertheless, only a year before, by means of judicious packing, a room had been found for an older cousin, Wade Winthrop, whose promise of a brilliant career in his own profession had been cut short by a pair of doubtful lungs. Accordingly, Boston was one law office the less, and Wade had come to New York to play at being reporter on the evening paper in whose official sanctum Mr. Stayre had place.

And Wade loved his cousin Sidney with a complete absorption which had made him wellnigh oblivious of the very existence of Sidney's sister, Phyllis. And Phyllis, on her side, could have laid her girlish heart at Wade's feet, if only he would have given her the slightest encouragement. Unfortunately, however, up to now, such encouragement had been wholly lacking.

On the day of Sidney's return from Heatherleigh, Phyllis's eye was at a crack of the curtains when Sidney came up the street, and Phyllis's hand was on the doorknob when Sidney parted from Rob at the foot of the steps.

"Well, home again?" was her curt salutation.

"Yes. Aren't you glad to see me?" The echo of her own good time was still in Sidney's voice.

Phyllis disdained conventional compliments.

"Had a good time?"

"Beautiful. I wish you had been there, Phyllis."

"They didn't ask me."

"No; but I wish they had."

"Shouldn't have gone, if they had," Phyllis replied still more curtly.

"I don't see why not."

"I hate being patronized," Phyllis made lofty response.

"But the Argyles don't patronize me."

"Yes; they do, too," was the disconcerting rejoinder; "only you are so tickled with them that you haven't the independence to notice it."

"Oh." Sidney's mind ranged in order the events of the past two days, and then ran over the order in swift review. The novel viewpoint appealed to her whole sense of the ridiculous, since, to her down-right mind, so long as she behaved herself and lived up to her inherited lights, she was by no means a candidate for patronage. Then, after one irrepressible burst of laughter, she dismissed the subject, without troubling herself to combat Phyllis's last notion.

"Has anything happened, since I went away?" she asked.

"Yes." With a sudden shifting of key, Phyllis dropped her voice to a melancholy minor.

"What? Nothing bad, I hope."

"Oh, nothing to speak of. One of the twins," as a general rule, Phyllis was wont to allude to her younger sisters in this impersonal fashion; "fell down the back steps and almost broke her arm. Then Tom had a chill, yesterday; to-day, mother is down with headache."

Sidney's face changed.

"Oh, Phil!" she said reproachfully. "Why didn't you send for me?"

"I wanted to," Phyllis responded virtuously. "I knew your place was here; but father wouldn't listen to a word about it. It was Mary's day out, too; but Wade took his supper down town at the club, so we managed to drudge along somehow." And Phyllis heaved a patient sigh.

Sidney bit her lip and pulled off her gloves with a jerk. Phyllis eyed her furtively, the while.

"You'll tear your gloves, if you're not careful," she admonished her sister in an accent that was just too chastened to be pert.

But swiftly Sidney had regained control of herself.

"Then I'll mend them again. Phil, you are a cheery soul to welcome a girl when she comes home."

Phyllis smoothed back her hair with the flat of her two hands. It was a habit she had, when she felt that she was ready to score a final point. Sidney's hatred of the habit, however, was based no more upon the association of ideas which it called forth than upon the curiously unlovely outline of Phyllis's head after it had undergone the smoothing process. To Sidney's mind, it was the duty of every girl to make herself as comely as possible, and then forget her looks entirely.

Phyllis dropped her hands from her hair, and faced her sister in bullet-headed self-righteousness.

"It seems to me, if you've had such a wonderful time of it with your friends, it should be your place to bring the cheer to me," she observed.

And Sidney picked up her suitcase and started up the stairs.

Half way up the flight, however, Pugs swept down upon her with a bomblike rush, seized her suitcase and then, suitcase and all, tumbled headlong into her outstretched arms.

"Glory, Tom! Here's Sid come back again!"

he shrieked. "Had a good time? Missed you like fury. Didn't Rob send me something? He mostly does. Mother said tell her as soon as you came in. Phyllis cleaned the hall closet, yesterday; and of course mother's all done up, to-day. I say, Sid, it's awful, when you're gone." And reluctantly he yielded his place to Tom and then to Bungay who stood at the top of the flight, vociferously demanding to be bear-hugged.

And Phyllis below put her chin in the air and marched on out of sight. Alone in the china closet, though, she pulled off her spectacles and wiped them on a corner of Bungay's bib, while she muttered forlornly to herself, —

"I don't see why they never perform over me like that."

Wade found her there, when he came in early from the office to welcome the returned wanderer. Phyllis was industriously engaged in polishing the table spoons, and a dab of whiting on one cheek, coupled with her red-rimmed eyes and pink and swollen nose, added the final touch of unattractiveness to her appearance. Wade, scrupulously dainty as was his custom, felt some slight shock at sight of the dishevelled figure.

"Oh, I thought Sidney was here!" he said, with uncomplimentary directness. And he started to go away.

"She's up-stairs." Until Phyllis spoke, she had no notion how hoarse and thick her voice had grown.

Averse as she was to showing any outward signs of woe, she bit off her final word abruptly.

Wade halted and looked back.

"What's the row, Phil?" he queried kindly. "Been catching cold?"

"No."

Wade possessed a sister of his own.

"Have you been crying?" he asked shrewdly.

"No." But Phyllis gulped, as she spoke.

Wade came back, crossed the threshold and stood looking at her keenly.

"You may as well own up to it, Phil," he advised her. "I've seen Judy, and I know all the signs. What's been the rumpus?"

"Nothing." Phyllis clattered the spoons with furious zeal.

"Well, all right. If nothing's wrong, I can't well offer any sympathy," Wade made philosophic answer. "Where is Sidney, then?"

"I told you she's up-stairs," Phyllis reiterated testily, for already she was angry at herself for having repulsed the long-wished-for sympathy. "If Sidney is all you want, I do wish you'd go and find her."

For an instant, Wade stared at his young cousin in a species of astoundment. Phyllis was always perverse with him; but, as a rule, she clothed even her perversity with stoic calm, and showed herself superior, unruffled. For one instant more, he stood there, hesitating; then, without another word, he turned on his heel and went in search of Sidney.

He found her enthroned upon her mother's bed, a twin on either hand, Bungay in her lap and Pugs festooned across her shoulder, while she gave rapid account of the events of the past two days. At his knock, however, and his demand for admission, she sprang up, ruthlessly tumbling the children this way and that, as she hurried forward to take his outstretched hands.

"Missed me?" she demanded promptly.

Wade Winthrop was twenty-eight, and dignified withal; yet now he looked a rollicking boy, as he made prompt answer, —

"Not one smitch. The world has turned to chaff with your return."

"Dear boy! My absence has gone on your nerves," Sidney said mockingly. "Come and sit down and hear about it all. I've had the best drives and sails, and seen the loveliest youth."

"Rob?" Wade queried, as he dropped into the nearest chair.

"No. Mr. Blanchard."

"Oh!" Wade commented briefly. "Rob's bantling." Sidney laughed.

"Yes, just about. Dear old Rob was so anxious that he should make a good impression that he turned himself into a veritable showman. Still, Mr. Blanchard really is nice. You'd never think, to look at him —"

"Hush, you young snob!" Wade cautioned her. "After the way you lay down the law to us, it's not

fair for you to corrupt us again. Blanchard is a good fellow, though. I saw him with Rob, one day, and liked him immensely. Is Rob going back to Exeter?"

"Not this fall. I don't think he dares trust himself in sight of a football field, and his father isn't willing he should take any risks. He will have a tutor, as soon as they come back to town."

"And what of Day?" Wade asked.

Sidney's answer was succinct.

"A darling."

"Rob's equal?"

Sidney knitted her brows thoughtfully.

"Yes — and no. On the whole, no. Not many people are. She is younger, and a girl; that may make all the difference. But you can see for yourself."

"How's that?" Wade inquired, as he leaned forward to seize Bungay and swing him to his knee.

"Because I solemnly promised Rob I would bring you out to spend a week from Sunday," Sidney told him.

Wade raised his brows.

"Rob?"

"Yes, Rob. Mrs. Argyle invited us both, of course; but Rob insisted on my accepting for you, so I did. It will be their last Sunday there, and they are going to have some other people, Mr. Blanchard and two friends of Day. I'm a little bit afraid of them, too. Day is so bright and off-hand that I keep forgetting

how elegant she really is; but these other girls may not be so — You must come, Wade. I need you to protect me.”

“That’s settled, then.” Wade laughed at her sudden change of tone. Then he asked abruptly, “Sidney, what’s wrong with Phil?”

Sidney rolled Pugs over on the bed, and sat on his feet to keep them still. Then she answered nonchalantly, —

“Why, nothing; is there?”

But Wade persisted.

“Yes. I found her wailing to herself, down in the china closet. Judging by the hue of her nose, it had been going on for some time.”

“Phil never cries,” Pugs protested suddenly. “She says it’s babyish to cry.”

The fervour of his assertion, however, aroused Sidney’s suspicions.

“Have you been teasing her again, Pugs?” she demanded.

But Pugs was able to prove a most unsentimental alibi.

“S’pose I’d go off and fuss with Phil, when you had only just come home?” he demanded in his turn.

“Something really was wrong, Sidney,” Wade insisted anxiously. “Phil had been crying, and you know she never cries. I tried to make her tell me what it was; but I couldn’t get a word out of her. I wonder why it is that I always seem to rub her the wrong way.” As he spoke, the boyishness had all

left his face, and anxious lines traced themselves about his kind brown eyes.

Sidney rose, crossed the room and stood leaning on the back of his chair where she slowly drew her hands across and across the wrinkles in his brow.

"Wade dear," she said; "have you lived here all this time without learning not to worry about Phil? She's a funny child, and all she asks of any of us is that we should leave her to go her own way."

Gently he reached up, took her two hands in his strong, lean ones, and drew her down until he could look straight into her eyes.

"Are you quite sure of that, Sidney?" he asked gently then. Then, letting go her hands, he rose and threw one arm across her shoulder. "Come, Tids," he added blithely, calling her by an old-time name that she accepted from his lips alone; "let's go downstairs and look the youngster up."

But, by the time they reached the china closet, Phyllis had vanished, leaving a little pile of half-cleaned spoons to mark where she had been. Only Tom, sprawling on his bed with his eyes glued to his book, could hear the stifled sobs that came from the adjoining room. But Tom's mind was with his eyes. Hearing, he paid no heed.

CHAPTER SIX

“GIRLS are queer things, anyhow,” Rob observed sagely to Jack, when they had gone, that Saturday night, to Rob’s room which the fulness of the house made it necessary for them to share in common.

Jack Blanchard was sitting in the wide window seat, with one shoe dangling from his listless hand, for the night was warm, and undressing seemed to his indolent mind an ordeal to be delayed as long as possible. At Rob’s words, he turned from a contemplation of the starlit heavens to face his host.

“How old are you, Rob?” he queried, with grave irrelevance.

“Seventeen, last year. That ought to make me eighteen now.”

A suspicion of a twinkle came into Jack’s brown eyes.

“Has it taken you all this time to find it out?”

“I usually have a bit of paper handy, when I do my sums.”

“Fudge! I mean about the girls. It was the first lesson I ever learned; I took it while I was still in knickerbockers.”

“Who taught it to you?” Rob asked, with a yawn which obviously detracted nothing from his interest.

"A frilly little damsel that went to the same school. I was an out and out socialist in those days, and my chief chum was the son of a cabman. He was a fine fellow, too. I chose him for his patches; but I adored him for his Irish wit. He was chums with the girl, too. She used to share his peaches and gobble up the pinkest side; but not all the coaxing in the world would entice her into inviting him to her parties."

Rob unfastened his collar with hands whose leisurely motions showed his thoughtfulness.

"Day isn't like most girls," he said then.

"Obviously not." Jack's tone was suddenly dry.

With unerring aim, Rob sent his collar flying through the air to land on the table across the room. The gesture was wholly impatient.

"Now look here, old man," he blurted out; "I didn't ask you here to get you snubbed. You know that; don't you?"

"Knowing you, I also know that."

"But those girls were beastly rude."

"I also know that."

"What made 'em?" Rob queried, as much of himself as of Jack.

The shoe in Jack's hand traced a short, straight line. Then, —

"Impassable," he said briefly.

"Then, by thunder, I'll sit it out to the end on your side!" Rob said irately.

"What's the use?"

"To teach them that I am a sane being, and choose my friends with care. Now you see here, Jack. Listen! Those girls are well enough. They're nice girls and pretty girls, quite the nicest ones of our set. But it is a set we inherited. Their mothers come to our mother's receptions; they come to Day's parties. For all I know to the contrary, we all may have been christened in a bunch. I've been brought up with them, and I know how they feel about things. So does Day. All the more reason they might be sure we'd not ask them here to our house to meet somebody they'd have to cut later."

Jack smiled a little grimly.

"They have saved themselves that trouble by cutting me now." Then he relented. "I don't mind, Rob; I have no especial fault to find. I'm a good deal older than they are, anyway."

"Six years," Rob reminded him.

"Yes; but, at our ages, that is a good deal. Besides, I have my work to look out for."

Rob made another interpolation.

"Yes; but you can't work all the time."

"No. Still, it is the main thing now. I've got to justify your belief that I am worth your father's while. That will take most of my time for the next few years. Don't misunderstand me," he added hastily. "I know what a thing it is for me: the way you all stand by me, the way your mother asks me here and makes me feel at home. New York wouldn't be much of a place to me, if you hadn't stood my friends."

"Yes; but our friends have got to do it, too."

"Cut it out, Rob," Jack advised him frankly.

"They won't do it; you'll only waste your effort."

"Effort be hanged!" Rob said shortly.

"And maybe lose your friends."

"Friends be hanged, too, then!" Rob added. "Only, in that case, they wouldn't be worth the rope."

Jack cast aside his shoe and rose.

"What's the use, Rob? Best leave things as they are. I ought to be content. Not many fellows have one friend like you, let alone a dozen minor ones. And, to-night, I didn't mind, as far as I was concerned. I did feel sorry for Miss Stayre, though. She was worse off than I."

"And the worst of it all was," Rob interrupted vengefully; "the little sneaks didn't do a thing you could put your finger on. Girls, too, so you couldn't knock them down and lick them. Jack, as I have observed before, there aren't many girls like Day."

From Jack's words, as well as from Rob's perturbed face, it was plainly manifest that Day's week-end party was far from proving the success of which the girl had dreamed. From her father, Day Argyle inherited a democratic spirit which, with her growth towards womanhood, was teaching her to choose her friends rather for what they were than for what they owned. From him, too, came an intrepid daring which made her wholly independent of certain threadbare rules of expediency. This last phase of her

nature had been helped on by her social position, for the Argyles were so situated as to make laws, rather than to obey them. Mrs. Argyle, cast in a gentler mould than was her husband, had been content to allow her only daughter to slide on from year to year among the friends whom she herself had chosen to bid to the first baby festivities which had marked her children's social career. But when, in the course of time, Day revolted from the monotony of that small circle, Mrs. Argyle had protested a little, cautioned a little, then yielded with the best possible grace to what her husband assured her was a natural result of Day's growth. Long since, Mrs. Argyle had accepted Jack Blanchard as a welcome guest, for Rob's sake, for her husband's, then for his own. Later, she was destined to do the same by Sidney Stayre. She had smiled a little at Day's birthday plan, and she had met Sidney with outward cordiality, but with inward question. The question had answered itself almost at once, and Sidney's most cordial invitation to return to Heatherleigh had come from Mrs. Argyle herself.

As for Day, her first attraction towards Sidney had ripened into a genuine regard; two hours after they first met, the two girls had parted friends. To Day's straightforward mind, the next and natural thing to do with her new friend was to introduce her to other friends of longer standing. Else, how increase her circle? Besides, having with Rob's help discovered Sidney, it was only fair to share the trove with others.

Accordingly, Day had confided to her mother all the plan for the week-end party. She would ask Sidney and her cousin, the cousin Rob had liked so well; and Jack, of course. Rob always insisted upon having Jack. And then, to meet them, she would ask Amy and Esther, quite the nicest girls of her own set. And so, by the time they all were back in town, Sidney would be nicely launched. Launched, a girl like Sidney Stayre could never sink.

Her mother had smiled and assented. She saw no need to hand on to her young daughter the social lesson that she herself had learned, the lesson that two and two sometimes make five, sometimes make only one and a half. In any case, no harm would be done. There was always the chance that Sidney might be able to hold her own. Her manners were like those of Day; her pride of carriage even greater. The mere details of her New York address and of her simpler gowns might easily drop out of sight.

Day, on her side, had looked forward to the event eagerly; she had met it bravely. It had required all the more bravery because, as Rob had said, there had been nothing upon which she could put her finger. Furthermore, it had held its own drop of humour. Neither one of the two girls had grasped the fact that the dark, thin man with the irreproachable tailor and the sunny smile was any kin of the girl in the home-made muslin frock. They had thrown delicate emphasis upon Sidney's social remoteness by receiving Wade Winthrop as of their

own world. Too late in the evening for it to do them any good, they had discovered their mistake.

The little party broke up early. Day lingered in Sidney's room long enough to unfasten sundry hooks of Sidney's simple muslin frock which, to Rob's masculine and uncritical eye, had held its own victoriously beside the French convent embroideries of the other girls. Then, dropping a hasty kiss on Sidney's round, bare neck, she turned away.

"I'll be back in just a few minutes," she added, as she reached the door; "but don't sit up for me."

Sidney glanced up in surprise. An instant earlier and to her mother, Day had confessed to an overwhelming sleepiness.

"Where are you going?"

Day hesitated. Then she made grim response, —

"Merely to have it out with them, before I go to sleep."

Sidney took a swift step forward and caught her hostess in her arms.

"Day, you sha'n't!"

But Day freed herself, and spoke with all the inherited dignity of the entire Argyle clan.

"I am going, Sidney. It is only fair and right to tell them what I think."

"You mustn't! You can't; they're your guests."

"Of course. But so are you."

The next instant, her footsteps were heard, passing down the hall outside.

Two fluffy heads and two pale pink dressing-gowns greeted her upon the other threshold.

"Day! You old darling! How nice of you to come! We were dying for a talk with you." So much was in duet. Then Amy, the daintier one and the fluffier, added, "This is the first minute yet we've had any good of you, to-night."

"I don't see why." But, for the life of her, Day was unable to maintain her frigid tone to the end of the phrase.

As Sidney had reminded her, they were her guests and, as such, entitled to her courtesy. And then they were fond of her, and fellow-sharers as well of a whole girlhood of memories in which Sidney, of necessity, could have no part. She relented a little and relaxed something of her grimness, as she allowed herself to be dragged across the room and pulled down upon the bed without which, as a background, no girlish gossip is ever half complete.

"Now tell us all about everything," they demanded, when the three of them were settled in an indiscriminate heap, with Day on top, out of regard for the frock which she had neglected to remove. "You've been gone, all winter, Day, and we've been gone, all summer long. It is ages since we've seen you, and you must have lots to tell. What have you been doing? Weren't you terribly lonely, up there in Canada?"

Day laughed, as she shook her head.

"Rob was up there with us, you know."

Esther was less tactful than direct.

"How funny you are, Day! I've been watching you, all the evening. You never used to have so much to do with Rob; but now you act as if you couldn't keep your eyes off from him, one single minute."

Day vouchsafed no explanation.

"Well, I can't," she assented tranquilly.

Amy made a little grimace of disgust.

"And, what's worse, he seems about as bad. He had the corner of his eye on Day, all the time he talked to me, to-night at dinner. It's not fair, Day, for a girl to have such a brother, and then monopolize him entirely. Isn't it a shame he never has left off his limp? Don't you believe he ever will get over it?"

"Do you know," Esther's tone was full of conscious sentiment; "I think it only makes him so much more interesting."

"So much more uncomfortable, you mean," Day said a little sharply. For some reason which she herself was unable to analyze, she felt suddenly loath to discuss Rob's weakness with either one of these chattering damsels.

"Oh, does it hurt him?" Amy asked, with wondering regret. "I didn't suppose it would by now."

"What do you suppose he does limp for, then?" Day queried. "Because he thinks it is becoming?"

"No. But he always looks so jolly and so — so splendid," Esther said, as she slowly untied the ribbon



“Day rose and faced them hotly.” Page 75.

from her hair. "I can't imagine his being uncomfortable for one single minute."

Day's thoughts dashed swiftly backwards.

"Well, he was," she answered curtly; "was, and is." Then she grasped the lesser bull by the horns. "What do you think of Jack Blanchard?"

With a sudden smile, Amy threw one arm across Day's shoulders.

"That you have been a perfect darling to take him up."

Day frowned in swift annoyance.

"I asked you what you thought of him, not what you think of me."

"But it's all of a piece," Amy persisted. "I only hope he appreciates it."

Day sat up and crossed her hands upon her knee.

"Appreciates what?" she demanded.

"The way you have taken him up and treated him like an equal."

"Why shouldn't we?" Day demanded again.

And Amy, heedless of the animosity in Day's tone, made rash answer, —

"Because he isn't."

This time, Day rose and faced them hotly, forgetful of the self-repression imposed upon her as their hostess.

"I should like to know why not, Amy Browne. He is as good as we are, and his father was as good as ours, even if he didn't have quite so much money. There wasn't a single boy in our dancing school, two

years ago, who had better manners; there wasn't one who was as kind and helpful to all sorts of people. You used to toady to Willie Van Gilt, because his father was building a better house than yours and just across the street. He was a dunce and a sneak, and made fun of poor little Monsieur Alcaire to his very face. He isn't worth Jack Blanchard's little finger nail, not even a cutting from it, and here you've sat and snubbed Jack Blanchard, all this whole evening."

"How have we snubbed him?" came in a two-voiced and indignant protest from the bed.

Day mounted her stilts.

"How haven't you, you'd better ask. We girls all know how to do such things in more ways than one. I know how, myself, Amy Browne; and they always did say 'Set a thief to catch a thief.'" Day laughed a little nervously. Then she held out a hand to each of her guests. "Now see here, girls, I've scolded like a shrew. I'm sorry; but you deserved it. You know you weren't quite fair to Jack, to-night."

And Amy was the first to own up to her penitence.

"We were horrid, Day. Truly, we didn't think. We're sorry now."

Day yielded to the hands held out in apology, and once more sat down upon the bed. Nevertheless, she aimed one final shot.

"I am afraid you will be more sorry, to-morrow, if you care anything about Rob. He just adores Jack

Blanchard, and, when he went off to bed, he was madder than I ever saw him before in all my life."

Amy still sat with her eyes fixed on the further border of the rug.

"Truly, I am sorry, Day, sorry and ashamed," she confessed at last. "I suppose I am a horrid little snob; but all I knew about Mr. Blanchard was that he had been a brakeman —"

"Pullman conductor," Day corrected her firmly.

"Well, something or other on a train; and it never had occurred to me that I would find him here to meet us."

"What if it hadn't?" Day queried, with exasperating calm, and Amy took refuge in silence.

"I suppose," Esther broke in upon the pause which was fast becoming embarrassing; "I suppose you'll say we weren't too nice to Sidney, either."

"You weren't," Day answered flatly.

For a moment, Esther faltered, somewhat at a loss what response she best would make. This calm, intrepid hostess was not the Day she had known of yore. It was not customary for a guest to be so soundly rated for her sins. Nevertheless, in the back of her girlish brain, Esther was conscious that she deserved the rating.

"I — I hope she didn't mind it," she faltered.

Day lifted her chin.

"Sidney is human," she said. "Still, I suppose she considered the source." Then, of a sudden, she dropped her censorious tone, and her voice took on

the well-known ring of the old Day. "I've been horrid to scold you, when you were my company," she said contritely. "I hadn't any business to do it; but I was so hurt and sorry. You see, these are my new friends. I had told them about you and wanted them to know you. Then, when I asked you out to get acquainted, it all went wrong. I suppose it was partly my fault. I ought to have told you that Sidney couldn't wear French gowns, and that Jack went to war instead of to Monsieur Alcaire's dancing class. Then you would have known. But, you see, Rob and I have been getting used to it by degrees. While we were gone, last winter, we knew some people nicer than we were, people who had to eat tub butter and cold roast mutton. That taught us a good many things. A year ago," she added honestly; "I suppose I was as bad as you; but now those things don't seem to count."

"Who is Sidney Stayre, anyway?" Amy queried meekly.

Day's glance included their group.

"One of the four nicest girls in the world," she said succinctly. "What is more, with your help, I intend she shall keep on being one of them."

And Amy held out her hand to Day, in token that she understood and pledged herself to help.

It was fully an hour later, the next night, when the seven young people went trooping out of the living-room in a merry group. Rob, however, lingered in the hall, with Jack beside him, while the others took

up the bedroom candles with which it was Mrs. Argyle's whim to supplement the electric light that, at other times, flooded the house. The girls went their chattering way. Then Rob turned to his friend, with a laugh in his blue eyes.

"Had a good time, to-day, Jackie boy?"

Jack Blanchard's eyes were thoughtful, however, as he stood looking out the window across the dark stretch of lawn.

"I'd like to know what struck those girls," he meditated aloud.

Rob chuckled. Then he answered tersely, —

"Day did." And, seizing his friend by the arm, he led the way out to the wide veranda which echoed for another hour with the two footfalls, one so steady and rhythmic, the other halting.

"Do you know, Dad," Rob said to his father, the next morning; "I believe I'd rather give up Exeter than Jack."

CHAPTER SEVEN

"I HOPE I am superior to my clothes," Phyllis said severely.

Rob cast upon her a comprehensive glance which included her tugged-back hair and her knotted shoe-strings.

"I certainly hope you are, Phil," he responded fervently.

With a bounce, Phyllis mounted upon the defensive.

"Well, I can't afford to go around, all dressed up, every single day."

For his only answer, Rob cast a second comprehensive glance at the retreating back of Sidney. Phyllis intercepted his glance and interpreted it with pugnacious promptness.

"She's welcome, if she wants to. She hasn't anything else to do."

Rob laughed outright. No one but Phyllis Stayre could have found it in her heart to resist the exceeding jollity of that laugh.

"Come off there, Phil," he warned her. "You know I never let anybody slang Sidney, when I'm about. You know as well as I do that she does no end of things, busy all the time, compared to you and me."

"I should think you might leave me out," Phyllis grumbled.

Rob rolled his blue eyes at her languishingly.

"Oh, but I should be so lonesome." Then his tone changed, and grew brisk once more. "Come now, Phil, do be sensible. What in the world is the use of making yourself look such a guy?" he admonished her, with exceeding frankness.

"Who cares how I look?" she demanded pessimistically.

Rob's answering shaft came too unexpectedly to give her time to dodge.

"Don't you?"

"I — I don't know."

"Of course you do. Any girl does, any girl that's half a girl."

But, by this time, Phyllis had once more rallied.

"Any girl that's half a girl should remember that her body is more than raiment," she said, with sanctimonious fervour.

Rob nodded in swift approval.

"You bet she should! Granted a respectable body, she should at once proceed to tog it out in respectable raiment. You aren't a beauty, Phil; but that's no reason you should straightway transform yourself into a fright."

Phyllis glowered at him and opened her mouth to speak. Then, with unwonted meekness, she shut her mouth and held her peace.

"Of course, this isn't a question a fellow is sup-

posed to mix up in," Rob continued placidly. "I know it's none of my business, Phil. Still, when you row Sidney as you did, just now, I'll be hanged if I won't make it my business."

Phyllis sniffed.

"Sidney doesn't care."

"No," Rob admitted frankly; "Sidney doesn't. To my mind, that's the worst of it."

Phyllis looked startled. Rob Argyle and his opinions counted to her for more than she cared to confess.

"I don't see why," she said.

"Because," Rob told her coolly; "you have banged away at her till you have made her callous. It's my impression, young woman, if the truth were told, you'd find out that Sidney Stayre has pretty much washed her hands of you."

Phyllis suddenly lost her poise and burst into open lamentation.

"Everybody has," she proclaimed.

"Apparently I haven't," Rob suggested jovially.

"No. But you are the only one. Nobody else cares what I do."

Rob's answer was unexpected.

"Day does."

"Hh!"

For an instant, Rob eyed her wrathfully. Then he laughed again.

"I wish you'd interpret that remark, Phil."

"I shouldn't think it needed any interpretation," she said morosely. "Any dunce knows what it means, and

any dunce knows that Day Argyle doesn't care two pins whether I go about in bloomers or a ball dress."

Rob wagged his yellow head to and fro against the back of the shabby Morris chair which he seemed to regard as his own particular place, whenever he was inside the Stayre home.

"Want proof, Phil?" he queried negligently.

"Don't care."

"All right." And, clasping his hands behind his head, he fell to whistling softly to himself.

Phyllis, leaning on the opposite chair, fidgeted with a loosened knob, ran her fingers up and down the rods, fidgeted with the knob once more until it fell with a crash to the floor.

"Drop something, Phil?" Rob inquired, without stirring.

"What about Day?" she asked, as she stooped to look for the missing knob.

"You'll find it over by the bookcase in the corner. I heard it roll that way. Day? Oh, nothing; only she told me, if Sidney could coax you into decent clothes, to bring you along with us," Rob said carelessly, and neglecting to add that the first suggestion of the plan had come from his own fertile brain.

Phyllis's face was invisible behind the back of the opposite chair, and Rob missed the sudden lighting of her eyes. By the time she stood erect once more, she had regained her former indifference.

"Where?" she asked, while she fitted the knob to position.

"Just to luncheon and then the matinée."

The knob refused to fit. Instead, once again it fell with a crash to the floor. This time, Phyllis let it lie.

"I never go to such places," she said shortly.

"Time you did, then. Come along, Phil. It's not too late yet. No matter what you said to Sidney," Rob coaxed her. "Sidney doesn't care; she knew you were just talking to hear your voice, and didn't mean a word you said. Go on and put yourself into your best clothes; it never takes you any time at all to get ready," he added artfully, for he had learned of old that Phyllis most of all prided herself upon her swiftness.

His artfulness bore unexpected fruit.

"You're sure you want me?" she asked.

"Sure."

"And that Sidney —"

"Sidney said she wished we might get you," Rob quoted with a literal truth which, however, failed to reproduce the accent that gave the phrase its meaning.

"Did she really say that?"

"Certain sure. Now go and get on your prettiest duds."

Once more Phyllis hesitated.

"But I haven't any pretty ones."

And Rob made rash, but reassuring, answer, —

"Then help yourself to some of Sidney's."

Wade Winthrop was more than commonly tired, that afternoon, when he left the office and, a half-

hour later, let himself in at the Stayre front door. For the most part, he enjoyed his work absolutely; but now and then it came upon his nerves. His maiden year upon the great evening daily had won for him a reputation as master of humour and past master of pathos. As result, he found himself sent hither and thither throughout the city to work up stories that would have been too elusive for less pointed pens. Never very robust, Wade was also far from being callous; again and again he wearied of this constant drain upon his sympathies. Again and again he sickened of this constant holding up to public view the narrow tragedies which yet were wide enough to cast a shadow over the narrow lives on which they lay. To what good? But now and then, when chance brought him back over the same trail, he found that some word of his, written at headlong speed with the boy at his elbow demanding instant copy, that some stray word of his had guided a helping hand towards the need he had described. Then and then only, Wade Winthrop took heart of grace. Perhaps, after all was said and done, even a reporter's life might accomplish some good, other than providing soothing sauce for breakfast or for the bedtime cigar. After each one of such occasions, he threw himself into his work more zealously than ever, with the discouraging result that other men, younger and of far less merit, were promoted to routine office work, while he still scoured the city streets.

To be sure, office work was forbidden to him. Months before, a trio of lung specialists had thumped and pummelled him, then offered it as their verdict that his lungs were never meant to exist within office walls. And Wade, loving law absolutely and holding in his young grasp a corner of success, had been forced to bow to the inevitable with what grace he could.

That day, he had been sent up to the borders of Harlem on an eviction case. By the time he had reached the spot, the law had shown its power, and a litter of furniture already strewn the street. Guarding it as best they might from a band of curious gamins were the bent old grandfather and the father whose broken arm had caused the whole destruction to their home. The mother was away at work; the little baby was wailing for her care, while the other children were running wild, half terrified, half inclined to regard as a glorified picnic this huddle of parlour chairs upon the pavement.

Long since, Wade had pledged himself to use his salary for just such cases; and now a coming storm made haste and double fees imperative. He finished his copy on the elevated train; then, with a sigh of absolute exhaustion, he gave it to the waiting boy and started off towards home.

As he boarded the crowded up-town car, he met Jack Blanchard, and Jack was beaming.

"I'm bound for the Argyles'," he explained, when they both were swaying to the beat of the car-wheels.

"Rob just telephoned to me to come up for dinner. He said your cousin was there, too."

And Wade's weariness was redoubled, as he went up the steps at home. On days like this, he found it a never-failing relief to see Sidney watching for him in the hall, waiting to hail him with some merry nonsense while he hung up his hat, then leading the way to the book-crammed library and settling herself for a gossip with him over the events of the day. Wade Winthrop liked his uncle, tolerated the children and gave to his aunt a dutiful affection. Nevertheless, it was for Sidney's sake that he had chosen the Stayre home to the more luxurious bachelor apartment which he could so easily have afforded. And now, when he wanted her the most, Sidney had deserted him and gone out to dine.

His key clicked sharply in the latch, and the door swung open. Then, —

"Hullo," observed a grudging voice from half way up the stairs.

Wade turned to look, and remained looking.

"Phyllis! That you? How — how well you look!"

A more carping critic would have objected to the implication that good looks were not of her normal condition. Phyllis, however, was too unused to favourable comment upon her appearance to be critical of the phrase. Instead, she laughed with shamefaced pleasure.

"You like it?" she queried.

"Like it!" Wade echoed heartily. "I should say

I did. Come down and show yourself, Phil. Why this sudden transformation?"

A step at a time and with long pauses between the steps, Phyllis descended the stairs.

"I've been to see *Peter Pan*," she said.

"Good for you! I didn't know you cared for such things."

"I didn't, only to-day." Phyllis spoke with a trace of her old antagonism.

Wade disdained it.

"Glad you've made a start into frivolities, young woman," he said gayly. "It will do you good. Will you go somewhere with me, next Saturday?"

He was surprised at the sudden dilation of her light blue eyes, at the sudden catching of her breath.

"With you?"

"Of course, unless you'd rather have a younger escort," he said kindly, never dreaming of the way her heart was drumming the blood to her ears, at the rapturous idea. Then, as she reached the bottom step, he caught her shoulders in his hands and drew her across the floor to the nearest window. "Why, Phil," he said; "you're really almost handsome."

There had been no mockery beneath his words; nevertheless, the girl's face twitched, and she made a swift effort to free herself from his grasp. For a moment, he studied her inquiringly. Then his hold upon her shoulders grew firmer.

"What is it, little cousin?" he asked kindly. "I know I've hurt you somehow; but I truly don't know how."

Phyllis shook her head sharply; but, for the instant, she dared not trust her voice to speak.

"But I don't like to hurt you, Phil," he urged again.

Phyllis found her voice.

"What makes you poke fun at me, then, the whole blessed time?" she demanded.

"But I don't."

"You do, too. You did it now. You're so taken up with Sidney that you don't think anybody else has any feelings, anyhow," Phyllis protested, in irate woe.

"What have I done?" Wade asked, in blank amazement.

Phyllis's answer came defiantly.

"You said I was almost handsome."

"Well, aren't you?"

"No; you know I am a fright."

Poor Wade thought despairingly of his looked-for hour of rest before dinner. Never was well-meant compliment received in more disconcerting fashion. In spite of himself, he smiled at the fervour of Phyllis's denial. Then he straightened his lips and steadied his voice. He was in for it now; he would go through with it and take the consequences as they came. He had never felt any especial drawing towards Phyllis, beyond the vague sympathy which one always bestows upon the ugly duckling. Nevertheless, —

"You're not a fright, Phil, not by any means. If you'd only make the most of yourself, you would be a good-looking girl."

"I do make the most of myself," she stated, with crushing finality. "It's not my fault that I haven't much to start on."

Again she tried to draw away; again she was forced to yield to his strong hands, as he bade her, —

"Look in the glass, Phil. You don't often get such a start as you have, to-day."

"To-day!" Her lip curled. "I look like a frowzy monkey, Wade, and you know it."

For his only reply, he stood smiling down into her face which, surrounded with its unwonted waves of hair and set off by a narrow line of scarlet velvet above the collar of her dark blue gown, was transformed into something not unlike the beauty with which Wade had jokingly charged her. To be sure, the long nose was thickly sprinkled with freckles; the eyes were washed-out blue, and the awkward stoop of the shoulders had no need of the help of the spectacles and the prominent eyes to proclaim Phyllis as near-sighted. And yet, taken all in all, Phyllis Stayre, that day, was not an unattractive girl.

"What are you looking at?" she demanded at length, grown restive beneath his steady scrutiny.

"You. I wish you'd do it oftener, Phil. You're good to look at now."

"I must be. Anyway, I didn't do it; it was Day. Rob took me there to lunch, and Day said I was too plain. She curled my hair and fussed me up, before we went to the table. I didn't mind it, just for the once," Phyllis explained with lofty tolerance.

"No; I should say not. I hope she showed you how she went about it," Wade observed, as, still holding Phyllis by the shoulder, he crossed to the old sofa that filled one corner of the hall.

"Me! I can't fuss to do this sort of thing," Phyllis protested.

"Why not?"

"What's the use?"

Wade was very tired. Unknown to himself, his very tiredness gave a little caressing intonation to his voice, as he answered, —

"Because I like to see it, Phil."

Again she looked up into his face with the same dumb gratitude of the beaten dog who finds a friend.

"Does it really make any difference to you how I look, Wade?" she asked unsteadily.

Touched in spite of himself by the absolute meekness of her tone, he dropped down on the sofa and drew her down beside him, gently, though with a secret expectation that she would rebuff him, the next moment. Instead, he was surprised to feel her nestle to his touch.

"Why, Phyllis child!" he said. "What is it?"

"Nothing," she replied curtly. "I only supposed that nobody ever cared. I — I'm glad that you do; that's all."

"But, Phyllis, we all care," he urged her.

"No," she made dispassionate answer. "They don't. You may care, you say you do. But most of them say, 'It's just Phyllis'; only my father. He

likes me; but he never knows how I look. The others don't mind much about me, one way or the other."

Wade hesitated. Then, —

"Is it all their fault, Phil?" he asked her.

"I don't know," she said honestly. "Sometimes I think it is. Sometimes I'm not so sure. I suppose I am queer, and the odd one. I don't seem to belong anywhere, or to anybody. The others generally let me alone. I'm thankful for so much, though. If they fussed at me, I should go wild."

Her hands clasped each other tragically, as she spoke, and her face twitched with the emotion she was doing her best to keep out of her voice. Then Wade, sitting beside her, seemed of a sudden to grow abnormally large before he vanished in a fog. The next moment, Phyllis was filled with mortification, as one large tear and then another slid down to the end of her long nose and tumbled off into her lap.

"I'm all sorts of a baby," she said brokenly, as she started to rise.

"Where are you going, Phil?"

"Up-stairs. I forgot something."

For his only answer, Wade pulled her down again at his side on the sofa.

"Phil," he said then; "I begin to think I've never been quite fair to you. I thought you didn't care to have us like you, that you preferred to go your own way, to make yourself a little — odd."

One great sob shook her shoulders. Then she faced him and spoke with sudden fury.

"Wade, I've hated it."

"I'm sorry," he said then; "sorry I didn't know it sooner."

"What difference?" she asked him shortly.

"This: that we might have been friends, ever so long ago."

"You had Sidney," she reminded him, with some asperity.

"Can't a fellow have two friends?" he asked, laughing.

"He doesn't want them."

"He does, when they're as unlike as you and Sidney." Then, at her frown, he changed his phrase. "You and Sidney were meant to set each other off, Phil. Your place is side by side. Instead of that, you go your ways." For a minute, he fell silent, drawing swift mental contrast between the two sisters, the one so sunny, the other shadowed by clouds of her own making. Then, just as he might have done to Bungay, he threw one strong arm around Phyllis's shoulders and cuddled her against his side. "Little cousin," he said gently; "it's my own notion that you're lonesome."

"Well, what if I am?" she said, a bit ungraciously.

"What's the use, when you have me to play with?"

"I never noticed that you cared to play with me," she said contradictiously. "People don't. They try it, just as Rob Argyle did, to-day; but they end by keeping Sidney to dinner and sending me home in the carriage. It's no use, Wade; I don't fit in anywhere."

I'm queer and cross, and you'd better let me alone, if you know what's good for yourself." And, with a sudden wrench, she pulled herself out of his encircling arm and rushed off up the stairs.

For a long interval, Wade sat there, staring after her retreating form. At last he spoke.

"Poor little termagant!" he said. And then again, "Poor Phil!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT was early November by now; Heatherleigh was deserted, and the shades of the Madison Avenue house hung wide open to the sun. The up-town streets, so long deserted save for the lumbering motor-cars whose claim it was to see all New York in a given number of minutes, were now beginning to take on a look of life. The summer exodus was ending, and late October had brought back to town even a sprinkling of the ultra fashionables.

Among this number, Mrs. Argyle disdained to count herself. Scorning convention, she came and went according to the comfort of the season and to the plans of her husband. Her old-fashioned idea of married life included spending a large part of the year in town, or else so near it that Mr. Argyle could come to her, each afternoon. Notwithstanding the lifted eyebrows of her friends, Mrs. Argyle preferred Heatherleigh and Madison Avenue with her husband to Newport and Lenox without him. She won her reward, if reward were needed for so obvious a bit of common sense, by the absolute devotion of her other half.

"The old phrase, better half, has come to lose its meaning," she said shrewdly to Mr. Argyle, one day.

"The modern husband isn't much more than a sixteenth, and the home gets on as well without him. For myself, I'd rather starve and keep the half I married."

And she was as good as her word. When most of his friends were left to live the life of vagrant cats, Mr. Argyle was keeping open house at Heatherleigh, swinging like a pendulum between his office and his attractive country home.

The Argyles always left Heatherleigh by early October. Day's school was beginning, and college was too near to make it wise for her to delay her studies. Rob, that year, was destined for a tutor. Two years before, he had been in the full tide of Exeter life, winning moderate success in study, wholly immoderate success in the athletics of his school. Then, in a single instant of the great game of the year, Rob had gained a lasting reputation in football, together with a wrenched leg whose injury had long been bidding fair to outlast even his reputation. A year of pain, more than a year of the self-denial which comes in the train of accidents like that, had passed since then. But Rob's pluck had never failed him. During all those long months, he had stared at life with the same undaunted, merry blue eyes with which he had been wont to follow the gain of his rivals on the football field.

Now, almost free from pain and limping but slightly, Rob was ready to resume his preparation for college; but both he and his father deemed it more wise for him to keep away from Exeter. There lay

the football field — and temptation. Rob's blood leaped in his veins, as he recalled the look of the old place, the scent of the gridiron fresh from an autumn rain, the sound of the cheering crowds upon the stands, the feel of the ball as he spun it in his hands. Then he looked down at the leg which still showed its battle scars, and he shook his head. No football yet for him. Therefore he wished no Exeter. It was the part of wisdom for him to lie up for another year, on the chance that his extra prudence be rewarded by a gain sufficient to allow him to try for the freshman team, when once he was in college. The doctor shook his head, to be sure; but Rob refused to be daunted by shakings of the head and spoken warnings. Many a fellow had had a far worse sprain than he, and had come out of it to go down the gridiron scores of times. In the career of such as these lay the best answer to the grave arraignments of the game. And, meanwhile, granted sunshine, he would proceed to make his hay.

Rob was a canny Scot. If a crammer must take the place of football, all that season, Rob would accept the fact as a direct challenge of fate. He would suffer himself to be crammed so far past the actual need that his next year's work would be half done and, sure of his standing in his classes, he would be free to give his full time to the game he loved. The crammer was the best to be found in the city; and Rob, who was by no means dull of brain, flung himself into work with headlong zeal.

There had been some talk, that year, of sending Day to a boarding school. Her veto and that of Rob settled the question speedily. The brother and sister absolutely refused to be parted. The next year, both would go into college. This one winter would be the last for many years when they could be together in the home. They begged so earnestly that Mrs. Argyle yielded her cherished plan and, side by side, the brother and sister fell into their routines of work. Day had even asked to be allowed to share the services of Rob's tutor; but there Mrs. Argyle stood firm. After all and all in all, girls needed girl companionship. For half the afternoon and all the evening, Rob and Day might be together, if they chose. The mornings Day must spend in school.

On the first morning, Rob watched her go, with secret misgivings. All the past winter in Canada, they had been in almost hourly contact. It was from out that contact that their present intimacy had grown. Before that time, Day had found that her girlish interests: her friends, her frocks, her young festivities and frivolities had kept her far too busy to leave her any time to think of Rob. In spite of himself, Rob dreaded her return to the old routine lest, with it, he be relegated to his old place in a remote corner of her plans. Instead of this, to his surprise, he found Day's outside life increasing, rather than lessening, her appetite for his society; and, as the autumn weeks went by, the appetite still increased.

Day's dancing class was not for Rob. Otherwise, that autumn, they did all things together, from going to the same parties to preparing their Homer from the same old dictionary and at the same hour. As a matter of course, they clashed a little now and then, for both were human, and healthy, and strong of will. However, the clashes were of short duration and only served to prove that, clashing, the metal of their love rang true. And, even in the clashings, there seemed to be no lessening of the desire of each for the other's company.

Rob's boy friends, for the most part, were away at school; but Day's friends protested and even sulked a little now and then. It was wasted protestation and sulking, however. Day refused to be swerved from her allegiance. Strange to say, she was learning her most lasting lessons in gentleness and girlish charm from her constant association with her blithe and wholly boyish brother.

Day's birthday gift from her father had been a fat little pony; and, all through the golden October afternoons, the girl went for long rides through the Park and on to the northward, beside the gleaming river. Rob, as a rule, was at her side, mounted on the tall bay horse his father had been used to ride; and, as they trotted along, many a head turned to smile after the great blond boy and the brown-haired girl in the trim brown habit.

One afternoon in late October, they had been far up the river drive. Returning in the golden sunset,

as they mounted the rise beside Grant's Tomb, Day drew in her pony to a walk.

"Don't hurry, Rob," she begged him. "Our lessons are done. If we're at home by dark, it will be soon enough, and afternoons like this can't last forever. Look! Isn't this better than Quebec?"

As she spoke, she pointed to the river at her feet flowing softly, gently down between its high, woody banks. Farther up the stream, the Palisades, in heavy shadow, hung threatening above the water. Beyond and below, the banks sank down to a distant level crowded with lofty walls and smoky chimneys; but, between the crowded, smoky levels, the peaceful river cut its blue and tranquil way to the bluer, restless sea. Here and there, the long blue stripe was barred by a trail of foaming white and gold, as the falling sun caught the wake of a passing ferry. The opposite heights were gay in their autumn dress of scarlet and yellow and russet brown; and, close at hand, the still white tomb balanced the gleaming bubble of its dome against the glowing sky.

"It is very lovely here," Day added, in a tone of absolute content.

Rob's answering words, however, brought her down to earth with a jolt.

"I'd give a cent to know what ails my jaw," he observed, as he prodded his cheek with an inquiring finger.

Day turned to him in swift alarm.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"It's stiff and queer and hurts," Rob answered, too intent upon his own researches to heed the anxiety in his sister's face.

"You don't suppose," Day quavered, with a fear which had survived from the nights of her remote childhood when she had lulled herself to sleep with a fold of blanket between her teeth, "you don't suppose — you don't mean you think — you've lockjaw?"

No training in the world could ever accustom Day's pony to Rob's sudden shouts of laughter. Now Day steadied herself sharply, as the pony shied.

"You've a fertile brain, Day," Rob assured her, as soon as he could speak.

"Perhaps it's mumps," Day made consoling amendment.

And Rob answered tersely, —

"Then I'll go hang myself for very shame."

And the subject was dropped.

That night at dinner, however, Day suddenly discovered that her brother was eating almost nothing. Challenged, Rob confessed that his throat and jaw felt queer; it was nothing, and would all be gone, next day. Most likely, it was just a little cold. Nevertheless, he spent the evening stretched at length upon the library sofa, with Day beside him, embroidery in hand and Jack Blanchard sitting by the fire. Next morning, Rob Argyle was a candidate for his own threatened hanging. The doctor, coming in early, had pronounced it a mild case of mumps, and ordered the patient into temporary captivity.

Rob growled, protested, and went. On the way, however, he gave tongue to his disgust.

"Confound it, 't isn't mumps; it's only half a mump!" he raged. "It makes a fellow feel a fool to have a baby thing like that, and then only have it half way round. Probably the other side will catch it next, and I'll have two whole cases out of one mumps. Oh, wurra, wurra, Day! Be thankful you had it when you were too young to be ashamed!" And, as the door opened to admit an early guest, Rob turned and hurried up the stairs, to hide his puffy countenance.

Ten days later, Rob's prophecy had so far fulfilled itself that the Argyle library had taken upon itself the look of a hospital ward for contagious disease. Not only had one side of his face caught mumps of the other; but Day and Jack Blanchard had caught it as well, caught it, too, in a generous and wholesale fashion that rounded out their cheeks to the shape of ripening pumpkins. Save for the ignominy and the inordinate swelling, however, there was no especial suffering. Nevertheless, Rob had been quite penitential, when he discovered that he had spread his woes over upon Day. When, however, word came that Jack's unwonted absence from the office was owing to the same infantile disease, Rob went off into a roar of laughter which eased his mind but well-nigh cracked his cheeks. That was at night. Next morning, over their trays which rested side by side on the library table, Rob imparted to Day the brilliant

idea which had come to him in the stilly watches of the night.

"I say," he observed so suddenly that Day, feeding herself oatmeal with the handle of her spoon, left a milky trail across the table; "I say, let's ask the doctor if Jack can't be bundled up with a blanket over his head, and hauled up here. It must be desperately dull for him, down in that boarding-house. Moreover, we're none of us very sick, neither are we in condition to make derisive comments about the others. Let's have Jack come up here, and we'll all mump it out together."

As usually happened, Rob's will carried the day. With some strategic skill, he planned the details of the moving and overruled the doctor's objections so successfully that, by noon, Jack Blanchard, who had lain awake half the night, dreading the ignominious tedium of the next few days, found himself luxuriously settled in the Argyle library, with Rob and Day to bear him company.

Misery loves company, a fact that is never half so true as when misery arrays itself as clown. Mumps endured alone rasp first one's pride and then one's temper. Rob's mump party, as he termed it, was a distinct social success; and the three young people, despite their discomfort, spent hour on hour of mad hilarity. It was almost with feelings of regret that they watched the disease run its course, and their distended cheeks shrink back again towards their more normal proportions.

"You really look quite peaked, Day," Rob observed, as he turned on the lights in the early darkness of a November rain.

For his sole comment, Jack Blanchard rose, crossed the room and snapped the switch.

"I refuse to see it," he said, when darkness lay over the room once more.

"You'd like it to last, Jackie?" Rob inquired tranquilly.

"Why not? I've never had a better time in my life."

"I have," Day made sudden protest. "I love to be with you boys, and we have had good fun; but I begin to long for an olive, and my whole soul cries out to gnaw an apple. Still, —"

Jack took the words from her lips.

"Still," he observed calmly, as he clasped his hands at the back of his head and gave a carefully-guarded yawn; "still, I fancy the time will come when we'd none of us care to forget the experience."

"Fancy a quarantine before the days of telephoning!" Rob suggested lazily, as he crossed to the rug and threw himself down on the floor with one elbow resting on the corner of Day's chair, drawn up before the blaze.

"Oh, what did Sidney say, to-day?" Day queried suddenly.

"Nothing, only jeered at us as usual. In spite of your experience, if it hadn't been for Bungay, she said she'd have risked a second attack, for the sake of seeing how you look."

"*You look!*" Day echoed. "At least, I matched on both sides. I used to be afraid you would tip over, whenever you stood up on your feet. You looked like a ship with all the ballast on one side."

Rob heaved a tremendous sigh.

"And felt like a ship without any ballast at all," he added ruefully. "That was what I hated most, the being starved for good solid food and having to eat chickendough."

Stooping forward, Day looked down into his merry blue eyes, upraised to hers in the firelight. Then, with caressing fingers, she fell to parting his yellow hair which he had rumped against her knee.

"Poor old Rob! You had a double dose," she consoled him. "But it did one good thing, forcing Jack to take some sort of a vacation."

"Vacation! Thanks, I'll take the office," Jack suggested hastily.

"How ungrateful of you!" Day objected gayly. "Next time, we'll leave you to mump along alone."

Jack's eyes showed his penitence, his trouble, too, at his seeming indifference to all their kindness. Older than Rob by five or six years, graver by reason of the responsibilities which life had heaped upon him, now and then he felt himself an alien to their merry tilting. For the most part, the Argyles' cordial welcome to their home had made him forget that, in reality, he was an acquaintance of but a few weeks' standing, that, in reality, his world was not the same as theirs. Occasionally, however, the

memory came back to him and took something from his complete content. It was always Rob who first recognized the mood, and Rob who could always drive it from him. Once won, the loyalty of Rob Argyle was practically undying. Side by side, one stormy winter night, Jack Blanchard and Rob Argyle had tasted danger in one of its bitterest forms. From that night and from the long, tiresome day that had gone before, had dated Rob's loyalty to Jack.

"No; we won't, then," he interposed now, before Jack could reply. "You needn't think I would have endured a week of it, shut up here with nothing but a girl for company. However, Jack, I think it is about as well for you to take a rest. Do you realize you haven't had a half-day off, since you came down with us, last April?"

"Off from what?" Jack queried, as he came forward to take the chair at the opposite end of the rug.

"Grinding," Rob said succinctly.

Jack bent forward, seized the tongs and fell to prodding the fire.

"Not any grind about it," he objected. "I like the office."

"What if you do? That's no reason you should take root there."

But Jack ignored Rob's interruption.

"And the work," he added.

"In moderation, yes," Rob commented again.

"And your father is very good to me."

This time, Day looked up.

"Of course. Daddy is good to everybody. But tell me, Jack, did you have any fun, this summer?"

"I spent four Sundays at Heatherleigh," he reminded her, with a smile.

"And it was your own fault that you didn't spend four more," Rob gave counter reminder.

Jack laid the tongs down, rose and stood with his back to the fire. To Day's young eyes, he looked very tall and dignified, in spite of his swollen face.

"I came here to be your father's secretary," he said then; "not to be your mother's guest."

Rob settled himself at ease, his head in Day's lap, his long legs spread out across the rug. Then he made placid answer, —

"Rubbish!"

"What's the matter, Jack?" Day inquired disapprovingly. "Are you getting cranky, or only just bored?"

"Neither. I'm only afraid you'll spoil me till I get flabby," he replied gravely. "For a fact, Day, it's not good for me to be here so much."

"Why not?" she asked, with a directness which matched his own.

"It spoils me for the other thing. I'm here to work, to learn a new business and, in time, to make myself a record in it. Instead —"

Day brought her hands down on Rob's hair with an unconscious force which made him wince.

"Instead — what? Instead of your spending all your evenings in a stupid boarding-house, we have

you come here now and then. What of it? Wouldn't your mother do the same by Rob, if he were living alone in Toronto? If not, I shouldn't think much of her. And do you think my mother isn't as thoughtful as your mother would be? Nonsense!"

Rob dodged again, at the very fervour of her tone. Day laughed, while she laid a reassuring hand upon his yellow head. Then once more she faced back to Jack.

"Besides, what if you are here?" she urged. "What if you were here, every single evening in the week? Would you work any less because you had been playing, between times? That's nonsense, too. Nobody ever works half as well, until he's learned to play; and that is what we're trying to teach you."

But Jack turned his back to the fire and offered remonstrance.

"Confound it, Day, that's not what I mean at all! The trouble is, I like to play too well. Don't you suppose I loved to be out at Heatherleigh? And now, these last ten days, in spite of untoward circumstances, I've had so good a time that I hate like mad the idea of going back down town, next Monday."

Day, leaning back in her deep chair, looked up at him with dancing eyes.

"What makes you go, then?" she demanded saucily.

"Duty."

"What duty?"

"To my landlady's grub," Jack made answer.

"Stay and grub here," Rob advised him, without troubling himself to stir.

"Alas, I'm convalescent," Jack said gloomily. "By Monday, I shall be out of danger, and driven out from quarantine."

"Nonsense!" This time, Day shook Rob's yellow head from her knee and, rising, she stood at Jack's side, looking up into his intent face. "Do you know," she added; "when you first came down here, my father wanted to have you in the house. My mother wouldn't let him, though, because —"

The scarlet tide rolled up across Jack's cheeks, as he stood looking down into her eyes with steady inquiry.

"Because?"

"Because," Day went on demurely; "both she and Rob thought you'd feel more independent, if you were free to go your way, after office hours."

For an instant, Jack turned and rested upon Rob a look of ineffable scorn. Then, —

"Rob, you idiot!" he said.

CHAPTER NINE

"YES, Jack moved up here, last night," Day told Sidney, two days later.

"To stay?"

"As long as he will. My father likes to have his secretary within reach, in case something comes up in a hurry. Jack is so faithful, my father says, that it seems too bad to put a single care on him, out of office hours. Still, —"

Sidney nodded.

"Still, I can see that it would be more convenient to have him here in the house. Besides," she glanced about the luxurious room; "it must be lovely for him."

"I hope he appreciates it," Phyllis said grimly, from her seat just inside the hall door.

"He looks to do," Rob answered, from the next chair where he had settled himself dutifully to seek to entertain their reluctant guest.

Phyllis smoothed down the lap of her gray woollen gown, then she clasped her gray woollen gloves demurely.

"Of course, I have never seen much of him, and I couldn't tell," she explained, with smug literalness. "So few young men have such an opportunity, that I hoped he would make the best of it."

Rob laughed.

"You would have said he was making the most of it, if you'd been here, last night. Eh, Day?" he queried.

However, Phyllis corrected him.

"I said the best, not the most," she asserted, and Rob subsided until he could assimilate his mirth.

"Really, we do enjoy having him here," Day added to Sidney. "He's always so kind, and mother says he is one of the best-mannered men she has ever known. We aren't to see so very much of him, though. He is at the office, all day long; and, three nights a week, he has some sort of lessons. Still, he's in and out, a good deal as your cousin is, and I think we all like the having him about."

"Of course, he eats at second table, I suppose," Phyllis averred suddenly.

Sidney turned scarlet. Before she could reply, however, Rob had struck in.

"Oh, no, Phil; he has a manger in the barn," he assured her tranquilly. "The cook takes him out the scraps, after each meal. Jack says he gets pretty good picking, too."

Phyllis glared at him in swift hostility. Suspecting a joke, she was yet unable to discover its whereabouts, and Phyllis Stayre hated nothing so much as to be pricked with the point of a joke she could not see.

"For my part," she declared; "I would rather eat the crust of independence."

"Jiminy, Phil! Where did you get all that?" Rob asked, with feigned consternation at the sounding phrase.

Sidney judged it wise to hasten her departure.

"Phyllis has been reading dictionary," she said lightly, as she rose. "Day, I truly must be starting. We only ran in for a minute, on our way up town."

"I didn't want to come, anyway; but Sidney made me," Phyllis added, determined not to be suppressed.

Sidney resolved to have peace at any price. Lacking a muzzle, she would throw a sop.

"I know, dear. You were tired, and I teased you. But I really will come now," she said, with a meekness she was far from feeling.

"I'm not tired. I only didn't see any sense in coming," Phyllis said contradictiously.

Under this second rebuff, Sidney coloured, and Day, watching, pitied her acutely. At her very best, Phyllis would be a trial. At her worst, she was well-nigh insupportable. And Sidney had to put up with her, week in, week out. Day shuddered at the thought. Then she gripped her courage in one hand, while she laid the other hand on Sidney's shoulder.

"Sit down again and talk to Rob," she bade her. "You must have any number of things to gossip over, and I've something I want to show to Phyllis, up in my room. Come, Phyllis." And, seizing the girl by one lank gray elbow, Day led her up the stairs, wondering all the way what she should do with her untoward guest.

When Jack Blanchard came through the hall, a half-hour later, they were still up-stairs, and Day thanked her lucky stars that it was so. By dint of keeping up a cheery and one-sided conversation, by dint of showing trinkets which Phyllis eyed with outward scorn and inward envy, Day had succeeded in bridging over thirty long minutes while Sidney, below stairs, could have time for a little rational and care-free talk with Rob. Up to this point in her acquaintance with Phyllis Stayre, Day had found her very presence death to any conversation. Phyllis either derailed the talk by means of some unexpected utterance, or else smothered it beneath the crushing weight of her disapproving silence. Even Rob's jovial banter faltered and flagged, when Phyllis was at hand. Day, from sheer force of conscience, generally succeeded in keeping up a random fire of commonplaces, but only enough of those to bridge the pauses. In the intervals of her commonplaces, however, Day was prone to wonder whether it was more inconvenient to have Phyllis talk or to have Phyllis keep still. As a rule, she was unable to decide the question. To-day, however, the decision was for silence. Phyllis's mind seemed to be running upon the subject of Jack Blanchard, and Jack Blanchard was not the youth to relish the hint that he would find his proper place somewhere in the rear of the butler's pantry.

Jack came up the front steps, two at a time, let himself into the hall and stopped on the library threshold long enough to exchange greetings with

Sidney and Rob. Then, still two steps at a time, he mounted the stairs towards his own room. Day's door stood open, and, as she heard his step coming towards her, she held her breath. Then she began to talk rapidly, in the hope of distracting Phyllis's attention. In vain.

"Who is that?" Phyllis inquired, disdaining the book which Day was holding out for her inspection.

"Where?" Day asked as innocently as she was able.

Phyllis cast upon her a glance of chiding.

"You can't put me off like that, Day; I'm not a baby," she observed, with chill displeasure. "You know quite well what I mean, and you may as well answer. Who is that in the hall outside?"

"That?" Day spoke nonchalantly. "That's Mr. Blanchard."

"Oh." Phyllis endeavoured to smooth her hair; but unfortunately she collided with her hat and knocked it awry. It took some time for her to straighten it, more time for her to recover from her passing vexation at having missed both her aim and her point. Accordingly, Jack had passed on up the second flight of stairs and out of hearing, before she could aim another shaft. "Oh, do you let him use the front stairs?" she demanded then.

Day's eyes snapped, but she held on to her temper.

"Apparently," she made brief answer.

However, Phyllis was in a contrary mood. The events of the day had rubbed her the wrong way. That morning, in one of her periodical descents upon

the kitchen, she had announced her intention of making sponge cake for her father's especial delectation. Unfortunately, Bungay and a broken top had appeared upon the scene at a critical moment; and, as result of their appearing, long after the cake was in the oven, Phyllis had discovered the unused sugar beneath the empty eggshells. Before she had had time to recover from that woe, her mother had decreed that Sidney must go with her to buy a long-discussed new gown. Sidney had begun her misdoings by vetoing a frock of muddy brown and insisting that, in its place, Phyllis should choose a warm, dark red, touched here and there with black. The mirror had borne out Sidney's judgment; but Phyllis had turned her back upon them both and had made open protestation. Sidney had smiled inscrutably, had paid for the red frock and then had chosen a feather to go with it, while Phyllis had stood by, in futile rebellion. Had she been but six years old, her wishes could have been regarded no less. And she was denied the comforting repinings of the six-year-old, the repinings that express themselves by means of tears and kickings of the carpet.

At Sidney's heels, she left the shop, silent, chin in air and teeth shut cornerwise. Outside the shop, Sidney completed the list of her misdemeanours by announcing her intention of a call upon the Argyles on her way up town. And Phyllis felt no love for the two Argyles, for Rob by reason of his teasing, for Day because she appeared to be so daintily superior

to all the sharp corners of Phyllis's own frame of mind and body. Accordingly, by the time she was inside the Argyle house, Phyllis Stayre was ready to perch herself on a corner of the most uncompromising chair and take it out on some one with a right good will. Only chance decreed that Jack Blanchard should be her point of attack. Phyllis had seen Jack once and yet again. She had liked him, as far as it lay in her crossgrained little soul to like any stranger. Nevertheless, he was the first issue which had presented itself, and she promptly took her stand upon the opposition. To her annoyance, Rob had been impervious to her shots; but not so Day. Downstairs, it had been wholly manifest to Phyllis that her hostess longed to box her ears. Upstairs, for an instant, Phyllis felt sure that the longing would turn to achievement. However, in Phyllis's present frame of mind, a box on the ear would have been a mere detail, leading to Day's need for apologetic self-abasement and her own opportunity to utter righteous truths. She saw with malign pleasure the flash of anger in Day's eyes, saw with sincere regret its passing. She essayed a second stroke.

"Of course, we only keep one servant," she went on; "but we always insist that she shall come up the back stairs."

Upon more than one occasion, Day had watched old Mary's slatternly heels go plodding up the Stayres' front flight. Nevertheless, she disdained the fable, and attacked the moral.

"Jack is no servant," she said shortly.

Phyllis opened her eyes wide and rubbed the end of her long nose.

"Why not? He serves your father; doesn't he?"

Careless of its morocco binding, Day tossed her book to the table.

"He is Rob's friend," she retorted.

Phyllis beamed in carefully-manufactured approval.

"Sidney has always said that Rob was very democratic," she vouchsafed.

"And mine," Day added tartly.

With a yawn, Phyllis rose.

"Oh, well, he's hardly worth arguing about," she said loftily. "Did you really have something to show me, Day? If not, we'd better go back down-stairs. Sidney may be getting in a hurry. It is Saturday afternoon, and her stockings aren't mended yet."

"Possibly you could lend her some, in case hers don't get ready to wear," Day suggested.

The shot went home, for Phyllis's feet were her one vanity, and always neatly clad.

"Sidney wears a number four shoe," she made prompt answer.

Another flash, this time of mischief, came into Day's brown eyes.

"So much the better; then she won't stretch your stockings. Did you say you'd like to go down-stairs?"

"Yes," Phyllis replied brusquely. "It's time Sidney and I were going."

Privately Day shared her opinion, and she lost

no time in leading the way back to the library where they had left Sidney, with Rob at her side. They found two easy-chairs drawn up beside the glowing coals; but Rob had vanished and taken Sidney with him. Even Day who, as a rule, was mistress of any situation, looked about her blankly. A very little of Phyllis, she had found, went a very long way.

"Excuse me," she said. "Sit down, and I'll go and look them up."

Phyllis deliberately made a survey of the room, deliberately chose the least comfortable chair, deliberately seated herself upon its extreme edge.

"Oh, don't mind me," she said then. "I'm quite used to being left."

Nearly an hour later, she was still sitting there in sole possession of the field. The moments dragged wearily by; but Phyllis had relaxed no whit of her dignity which still manifested itself by means of the aggressive straightness of her spine, by the uncompromising fashion in which her feet were planted on the floor. Now and then she chafed her nose; now and then she rubbed back her hair; now and then her lips moved slightly, as she rehearsed to herself the crushing words with which she would greet the truants' return. Then she folded her hands anew and shut her teeth. No hostile eye, peering around some distant corner, should ever be able to affirm that Phyllis, waiting, had arranged herself at her ease.

The house was very still. Only the ticking of the clocks broke the silence, the clicking alarm for the

hour, and then the hour itself. Five o'clock! Phyllis smothered a yawn; then once more assured herself, by a hasty touch, that her lips were rigid. Far away up-stairs, she heard the sudden opening of a door. Then steps came slowly down the stairs. She straightened herself yet more, and hitched a bit nearer the front edge of the chair. Rob was coming back alone, probably to tell her that Day had coaxed Sidney to stay to dine. Phyllis could imagine just how he would come strolling in, his hands in his pockets, and nonchalantly deliver himself of his message. Swiftly she set to work to compose her answer; but the answer was only half ready when she realized that it was not Rob, after all, who was coming down the stairs. The footfall, though as slow as his, was perfectly even in its beat. The next instant, Jack Blanchard stood on the threshold, and Phyllis, whose god was neatness, took swift note of the fact that Jack had emerged from his leisurely toilet, fresh and sleek and crisp as a man could be.

At sight of Phyllis, tentatively seated in a corner of the room and quite alone, Jack halted in surprise.

"How do you do, Miss Phyllis? Where are the others?"

"I am sure I don't know." Phyllis's tone was of crushing finality.

"Haven't you seen them?"

"Not for some time."

Jack misconstrued the hostility of her tone into injured feelings.

"Why, you poor little chap!" he said, with off-hand kindness. "I'll go and call them for you."

From behind their spectacles, the pale eyes shot upon him one glare of indignation. Then Phyllis said icily, —

"No need, thank you. They know I am here."

"Oh. Then they'll be coming soon?" Jack's accent was interrogative.

"It is impossible to say." Phyllis spoke with nippy brevity.

Into Jack Blanchard's keen brown eyes there came a sudden flash of humour. Phyllis was a specimen new to his experience. Having no desire to own her, he yet confessed to himself a deep desire to have more, much more, of her conversation. He strode across the room and gave an inviting twitch to one of the chairs before the fire.

"You might as well be comfortable, while you wait," he suggested hospitably.

"I am quite comfortable, thank you."

Jack's eyes twinkled.

"Stiff in your spine?" he queried irrepressibly.

"No."

Then silence descended upon the room.

With perfect unconcern, Jack dropped down into the unoccupied chair, bent forward to punch the blaze, then settled himself at his ease and waited, his fingers meditatively arched before him, and his brown eyes on the girl who held her place, grim and motionless, beside the door. The most captious

critic could have discovered nothing at all discourteous in his manner. Finding Phyllis there alone, he had done his best to engage her in conversation. Phyllis, however, had refused to be engaged, and now his obvious duty was to await her pleasure. He found it slow in coming.

Underneath her grim exterior, however, Phyllis was conscious that the moments were passing laggingly, each one longer than the last had been. She had rashly chosen her seat in a corner whence she could only see the clock by bending forward in her chair. Under Jack's merry, steady eyes, it would have been undignified to crane her neck too often. She fell to counting the seconds as they passed, marking the completed moments on her fingers, and beginning again at one. At the end of the third minute, however, Jack cleared his throat and she lost count. Patiently she began again; but, midway through the fifth minute, she was assailed by an itching between her shoulderblades, and she lost count again while she made surreptitious efforts to scratch her back against the corner of her chair without her companion's being aware of the fact. Then a cramp developed itself in her right little toe, followed by a distinct crawling sensation, as of a spider on the back of her neck. Phyllis hated spiders, and this one felt to be all legs.

"U—uh!" she said, almost involuntarily.

Jack sat up.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with swift courtesy.

Phyllis plucked at the top of her collar.

"What for?" she demanded, as she plucked again.

"I thought you spoke."

A third plucking brought away a bit of thread frayed from the collar's edge; but, by this time, Phyllis's temper was frayed far more than was her collar.

"Well, I didn't!" she snapped. "At least, not to you."

This time, Jack Blanchard's eyes widened and lost their twinkle. To his English turn of mind, most things were to be expected in an American girl; but Phyllis Stayre possessed more unexpectedness than even he could pardon in her race. Eight years younger than he, the girl seemed to him a mere child, fractious and petulant. Nevertheless, he still addressed her with the courtesy which, forfeited by her rudeness, he yet felt was due to her girlhood.

"I am sorry you feel like that, Miss Phyllis," he said gravely. "What have I done?"

Phyllis's voice went up an octave.

"Oh, nothing," she said, with what she intended for crushing finality.

Day, meanwhile, had found Rob and Sidney in the large conservatory at the back of the house. Sidney's hands were full of blossoms, and now the two friends stood leaning on the edge of the aquarium, watching the goldfish come to the surface to tease for food. Day joined them there, and they stood together for a long time, talking idly of this thing and of that, of Day's school and of Sidney's, of Jack Blanchard's



"The two friends stood leaning on the edge of the aquarium."

Page 122.

coming to live among them, then, by way of Jack's past, of the good friends they had left behind them in Canada. Time spent in happy reminiscence passes quickly; but at length Sidney roused herself with a start and glanced down at her watch.

"Dear me!" she said in consternation. "We have been here ages, and I forgot all about Phyllis."

Rob's laugh was as free from all malice as was his downright question, —

"Well, do you mind much?"

"Yes," she said directly; "I do. That is, sometimes. This is one of Phyllis's days. She has them now and then, and then I always worry for fear of what she'll say next. At home, we're used to it; but other people —"

"Won't stand it, the way you do?" Day asked, laughing, for Phyllis's eccentricities were so obvious as to make it impossible to ignore them.

Rob, however, interposed.

"Won't give her credit for the really decent stuff she's made of," he corrected. "Phyllis's crankiness is skin deep. Some day, she'll slough her skin."

"I wish she would, and soon," Sidney made anxious answer. "Where did you leave her, Day?"

"In the library. I ought to have brought her along," Day said penitently; "but she had been so bored, up-stairs, and I had hardly seen you at all. Besides, I thought I'd only be gone a minute."

"And you liked us better than you meant, and stayed accordin'," Rob capped her sentence for her.

"Well, never mind; the mischief's done, so there is no use in mourning for your sins, at this late day. Come along and find your nettle." And he led the way, with Sidney at his side, out from the conservatory, through the house and towards the library door.

On the threshold, still with Sidney at his side, he halted. In one of the chairs before the fire Jack Blanchard was seated, and Jack was speaking.

"What have I done, Miss Phyllis?" he was asking, for the second time.

And from a distant corner behind the door came Phyllis's answer, frigidly distinct, —

"Nothing at all, Mr. Blanchard. It's only that I'm not Day Argyle. I've never travelled very much; but, when I did, my father always told me not to talk to any brakeman."

CHAPTER TEN

THAT same evening, Jack Blanchard mounted the Stayre front steps, rang the bell and asked for Sidney.

"I knew I'd find you worrying," he said, directly she came into the room. "All in all, I thought the best thing I could do, was to come up as soon as possible, and laugh it out." Then he dropped Sidney's hand and moved a chair a bit nearer the crackling fire. "We both of us know the child ought to have been shut up in a dark closet," he said then, with a laugh so infectious that Sidney, perforce, joined in it. "Still, she is rather large for such discipline. I'm sorry, though, you had the worry of it."

Dropping into the chair, Sidney faced him with eyes as level and keen as were his own.

"It was nice of you to come," she told him. "Not many men would have been so forgiving."

He laughed again, as he took the chair at the opposite end of the rug.

"There wasn't anything to forgive. She had a pain in her temper, and she stuck out her claws. It was only chance that put me, and not you or Rob, in the way of them. There was no personal grudge about it."

"But she was so rude," Sidney protested.

"No more than if she had objected to the size of my nose, or any other little personal detail. The only trouble was, she wasn't quite sure of her facts. Really, Miss Sidney, I never was a brakeman in my life."

Under his jovial exterior, there lurked a slight seriousness, as if he cared for the girl's opinion and were seeking to justify himself in her eyes. Her answer plainly caused him a little shock.

"What if you were?" she asked tranquilly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing; except that it would have showed I wasn't fit for something better."

"Or that nothing better offered," she corrected him. "The main thing was your taking whatever came. That's what we Americans like, you know."

Jack coloured at her outspoken approval. Then he tried to pass it off lightly.

"And what we English do?" he queried. "Still, it doesn't sound nice to be a brakeman, I confess; I'd much rather run a Pullman sleeper. I suppose it's all a matter of prejudice; still, I feel for Phyllis."

"Phyllis ought to be —"

"Abolished," Jack said, with another jolly laugh. "However, she has given us all a new sensation. I had never realized till then that Rob Argyle could lose his temper."

Sidney laughed at the recollection.

"It was justifiable," she said; "also thorough-going. For a minute, I wondered whether there

would be pieces of Phyllis left, large enough to be worth the taking home."

"I wondered, too," Jack assented.

"However, Phyllis isn't easily pulverized," Sidney added, after an instant of pause. "I did my best, on the way home, to supplement Rob's work; but it didn't seem to count for much."

"She probably set you down as a fellow democrat," Jack suggested idly, and Sidney's rising colour gave assent to his words.

"After all," Jack went on suddenly, breaking in upon a little pause; "do you know, I sometimes think we all take Phyllis too much in earnest."

"How can we help it?" Sidney asked, with some abruptness.

"She's nothing but a child," Jack reminded her.

"Old enough to know better," Sidney objected.

"But not old enough to do better," Jack reminded her again.

Sidney considered the distinction and finally accepted it.

"She is only a child, I suppose," she admitted honestly then. "Still, she has a most mature sense of the wrong thing to say. Phyllis doesn't blunder. When she sins, she goes to be bad."

Jack bent forward and rested his elbows on his knees.

"In other words, she thought I was getting too cocky, and tried to put me in my proper place?" he queried, and once more Sidney's rising colour gave assent to his words.

For a moment, he sat silent, his chin resting in his cupped palms.

"Well," he said philosophically then. "Perhaps I am."

"What nonsense!" Sidney exclaimed, with hasty scorn.

"No," Jack went on reflectively. "It is the most natural thing in the world. Still, I have had some temptation. At best, to us Canadians, the way people like the Argyles live is like a bit out of a fairy tale; as a rule, we don't get picked up and stuck between the leaves. And Rob and Day — Miss Sidney," he faced her with level, steady eyes; "it doesn't often happen to a chap to make such friends."

"No," Sidney assented simply; "nor to a girl."

But, as if heedless of the interruption, Jack went on, his thoughtful eyes bent now on her face, now on the fire.

"I can't seem to get hold of it, myself, hold of it that it has all happened to me. It's like one of the Sunday stories I used to read, when I was a little chap. I meant to be decent to the people that I took up and down; Rob was only one of the rest. I liked him at the start; but I didn't think much about him till that stormy day —"

Sidney nodded.

"Rob told me," she said briefly.

"That stormy day I took him down. I liked his nerve. He was very lame then, and half-wild about his sister; and the trip was the worst I ever knew.

He took it like a hero, never grumbled nor asked fretty questions, took it all, even to crossing the river when the captain himself said afterwards he never expected the boat to come through the ice, right side up. No wonder I liked him and looked out for him. Honestly, Miss Sidney, I had no idea he was John Argyle's son."

Sidney laughed at the notion.

"Who said you had?" she demanded scornfully.

Jack's glance never wavered.

"It got about in the Quebec office, started, I suppose, by another fellow who shared the run with me. The honest fact is, I had never heard of John Argyle at the time, still less had any idea he was down there in Quebec."

Sidney, leaning back in her chair, watched him with approving eyes, took note of the strong, thin hands, of the straight brown brows, of the thin lobes of the well-set ears, of the poise of the well-set head. Then, when she feared her silence had lasted far too long, she spoke.

"Do you know, Mr. Blanchard, it wouldn't be well for any one to talk that nonsense to Rob Argyle."

"You think?" He looked up expectantly.

"I think he would be powdered to dust finer than that Phyllis was reduced to," she replied succinctly.

"But go on."

"That's really all, as far as my part of it goes," he told her. "The rest is all the sequel, and the Argyles have done it. It was the business chance

of my life to come here. I couldn't believe in my luck, when Mr. Argyle offered me the place in his own office. Even then, I had no notion of all the rest; that Rob would be my friend, that Mrs. Argyle would ask me to the house now and then."

"And now," Sydney added; "you are there to stay."

"Yes," he assented, with a gravity that filled her with surprise. "I feel as if I knew what home were like again. It is the final miracle, and I only hope it won't make me lose my head." Suddenly he sat up straight, shook his broad shoulders and spoke with his old-time alertness. "I beg your pardon, Miss Sidney. I had no intention of drivelling on like this. When I came in, it was with the sole intention of demanding mercy for your sister. Tell me, did you take it out of her very badly?"

Sidney roused herself from the spell of his frank brown eyes.

"Not half so badly as she deserved," she answered, with a return to her own blithe manner. "In fact," she added, laughing; "I rather think she took it out of me."

Jack eyed her keenly for a moment. Then, —

"I suspect she generally does," he retorted. "Phyllis doesn't impress me as being a nice person to run up against in the course of an argument."

"She generally holds her own," Sidney rejoined, with a certain pride in the mental agility of her younger sister. "Her remarks don't always bear on

the main question; but they usually end by silencing me."

"Spikes your guns?" Jack queried. Then once more he faced Sidney gravely. "Honestly, Miss Sidney, you don't mind about this afternoon?"

"I did at first," she replied as honestly as he could have wished. "An apology wouldn't have mended matters, and Phyllis is rather large to shake. That was the worst of it all, I didn't see just what to do. I felt I must take vengeance of some kind, though, just to warn her that she wasn't to repeat the experiment."

"What did you do?" Jack asked, curiosity overcoming formal courtesy.

Two deep dimples came into Sidney's cheeks.

"Phyllis hates to sew," she explained demurely. "I ripped out the hem of her best frock."

Jack roared.

"You're a born strategist. She'll get the better of you, though, by wearing it that way and telling people you did it," he predicted.

"You don't know Phyllis. She'd be tidy, if she were on her death bed," Sidney assured him. "She is probably sewing it up again now, and raging while she sews."

"Then it behooves me to stay out of her way for the present." Jack rose, as he spoke.

Sidney beckoned him back to his seat, and her gesture was imperative. When he had obeyed it, she spoke.

"No," she said. "I am the sinner. Sooner or later, I shall have to take the consequences. Phyllis has her off days, every now and then, when things go wrong. Then she takes it out on everybody and everything she meets. You happened to get in her way; and, besides, she knows Rob likes you and she counted that she could hit two people at once. But really, Mr. Blanchard," she faced him suddenly; "Phyllis isn't always like that; her cranky ways aren't all there are of her. My cousin says she has some splendid traits, if we can only make the best of her."

Jack smiled a little. Even in his short acquaintance with Sidney Stayre, this was by no means the first time he had heard her quote the final authority of her cousin's word.

"Oh, I'll risk Phil," he assented. "She is bound to come out all right. As I said, the trouble is that she is so large that we forget she is nothing but a child, and we take her too much in earnest. I'll do my best to make peace, when I see her."

Sidney shook her head.

"Phyllis is meek now. I think you won't have to do much making." Then she dismissed the subject utterly. "Tell me, Mr. Blanchard, what do you hear about your mother?"

And Jack told, freely and fully. While he told, he pulled out from his pocket a shabby little photograph, and Sidney sat and listened long, her eyes upon the pictured face. Then Wade came saunter-

ing in, fresh from the club and full of the good stories he had picked up there, and the two young men drifted off into random talk of past experiences, Jack's in the field, Wade's in his law office, and both, still farther back, in the universities they loved so well. Now and then Sidney put in a word; but, for the most part, she sat back and listened. Liking, as she did, both Jack and Wade, she delighted that, in this first long talk of theirs, they should hit it off so well together.

Meanwhile, in her room up-stairs, the room which she shared with the twins, Phyllis sat rocking to and fro and sewing with impatient jerkings of the needle which played sad havoc with her thread. In the large bed at the farther side of the room, the twins lay cuddled together, fast asleep. Phyllis sat beside her own bed on which she had spread out a great array of threads and pins and needles. As Sidney had said, the girl hated sewing, and touched a needle only under compulsion. When she could tuck her mending into the baskets of her mother or Sidney, she did so without conscience. When she was fairly cornered into it, as now, however, she could sew neatly, albeit with a singular lack of deftness which prolonged her task to twice its normal limits.

To-night, she admitted to herself, the task was for herself and for herself alone. Sidney would be the last person to come to her rescue, and Phyllis shrewdly judged it best to make no appeal to her mother for aid. An appeal would show the need; the need

could only be accounted for by explanation of its cause. Phyllis had hidden herself, work and all, from sight, when her mother had entered the room to make sure that the twins were asleep, earlier in the evening. The chair was still rocking, as Mrs. Stayre crossed the floor, and the corner of the counterpane still swaying before the prostrate form of Phyllis; but, happily for Phyllis, Mrs. Stayre was both near-sighted and intent upon the twins.

"She doesn't catch me, if I can help myself," Phyllis observed grimly, as she crawled out from under the bed and dusted off her skirt. "Sidney is a beast; but there's one decent thing about her, she doesn't tell any tales. Next time I sauce her chums, though, I'll make sure she isn't snooping around just outside the door. Sidney is sharp; but I'll be a match for her yet. As for Rob — bah!" And Phyllis gave a disdainful flirt of her needle which promptly resulted in a brace of knots.

In spite of herself, Phyllis had been forced to admire the ingenuity Sidney had shown in devising her punishment. All the way home, the older sister had been ominously silent; and Phyllis had at last resigned herself to the belief that an appeal to her father was imminent. In a family like the Stayres, misdeeds were bound to be frequent; among so many children, friction was bound to be. No two mortal parents could cope with all the problems offered by seven children, and it had come to be an established law that only extreme cases should be

carried up to this final supreme court of parental justice. Minor cases were settled by the children, promptly and out of hand and, for the most part, with a surprising degree of justice.

Phyllis was quite aware that she richly deserved to be sent up to the higher court. Rob Argyle had left her in no doubt whatsoever of her own sins; and Sidney's absolute silence had carried home Rob's more vociferous lesson. Phyllis's conscience, too, was uncomfortably alert. Heretofore, she had rather liked Jack Blanchard. To-day, she had assaulted him, chiefly by way of making herself unpleasant to the others, and her assault had been so thorough-going as to have left no doubt of her intended hostility. Curiously enough, the fact that she had wantonly hurt Jack had aroused in her a certain antagonism towards him, an antagonism which had been multiplied tenfold by the jovial laugh with which Jack had broken the silence which had followed on her words. It was as if she had expended her whole strength to bend her bow, only to have her arrow go astray, leaving nothing but her blistered thumb to mark the shot. Phyllis was all a girl. If Jack had winced, she would have been the first to feel his pain. Instead, he had laughed, and she had resented it accordingly.

Her needle slipped to the floor and rolled under the bed. Phyllis stooped to pick it up and, stooping, became suddenly aware that the room was very hot. Impatiently she brushed a loose lock of hair

from her forehead, rose and opened the door into the hall. As she returned to her seat, she heard, coming up from below, the murmur of voices, and then Sidney's laugh.

"Mean old thing!" she said vindictively, as she rubbed her sticky, warm hands upon her gown. "All she has to do is to sit there and have a good time, and not think a thing about me. Oh—h—h, dear! Oh, that does prick so, and I am so warm! It's cruel, and Sidney is so horrid." She sucked her thumb tenderly, then took it out of her mouth and squeezed it, in the hope that the injury was bad enough to arouse the pity of her hard-hearted sister. "I never shall get this done, never! She ought to help me, and not sit there, laughing like a ninny. I wonder who is down there with her."

Leaving her skirt on the bed, Phyllis rose, tiptoed across the room and listened at the door. She came back again, frowning, and caught up her skirt with a jerk which promptly unthreaded her needle once more.

"It's that Blanchard brakeman!" she said to herself morosely. "What do you suppose he is doing here? Sidney ought to pick out her friends better than that. Most likely he's come to talk me over. He's got me into a nice scrape, as it is. I'd like to get even with him."

For a few moments more, she sewed industriously, while she rocked with an increasing fervour which at last lifted her feet completely off the floor at every backward dip. Her thread knotted badly, and her

brows knotted still worse; her underlip was caught fast between her strong, white teeth. Suddenly and with a vicious click, she brought both heels down upon the floor, nodded sharply and, letting fall her work, stroked back her hair once, twice, and yet again.

"I'll do it," she said shortly. "I detest him, and then it's only fair."

Arming herself with a sharp-pointed pair of shears, she kicked off her shoes, thrust her feet into the moc-casins which Sidney had brought home to her from Canada, and crept out into the hall. There, hanging over the banisters, she listened intently. After the fashion of the older sort of city houses, the stairs were in one long, straight flight which wellnigh pierced the building from front to rear. Leaning over the rail at the top of the flight, Phyllis was just above the half-open door of the library whence came the busy murmur of voices. The foot of the stairs was close to the front entrance, where the old mahogany hat-rack stood just beyond the parlour door and two rooms away from the cozy library in the rear.

For a moment, Phyllis bent over the rail and listened, not from any thought of eavesdropping, but merely to assure herself where lay the strategic points of her campaign. As she stood there, Wade's voice came clearly to her, and Sidney's, and Jack Blanchard's laugh. Then she heard her own name and another laugh. She shut her teeth askew, straightened up and clashed her scissors noiselessly but with vindictive fervour. Then, stealing away on

her moccasined toes, she crept softly, slowly down the stairs, holding her breath while she came opposite the half-opened library door, and then breathing more freely, as she reached the foot of the staircase. A moment later, she was rummaging among the coats that filled the broad old rack.

Inside the room, Wade Winthrop had raised his hand in warning.

"Bungay," he whispered, and then, without a pause, he went on with his uncompleted sentence.

Sidney laughed and nodded. She knew Bungay's favourite trick of stealing down upon them, tousled and pajama-ed, whenever he chanced to wake up and find them talking. More than once, he had appeared to them in the parlour, to the astoundment of more formal guests; but now the fiat had gone forth that Bungay, if he desired to escape punishment, must confine his appearances to such times as they were settled in the informal surroundings of the library. Doubtless, such an appearing was now imminent. For a moment, she faltered. Then she reflected that, months before, Jack had made acquaintance with Bungay's brief pajamas, and she held her peace. Wade, in the meantime, while talking steadily, had scribbled a note on the back of an envelope and tossed it across to Jack.

Jack read it, nodded, wrote a few words and tossed it back, —

"All right. Let's make a sally and catch the little chap, before he knows it."

In his turn, Wade nodded, then passed the note to Sidney. An instant later, all the three, laughing silently, had risen and tiptoed to the door. There they paused for a moment. Then, giggling like a boy, Jack raised his hand.

"Villain, surrender!" he called in stentorian tones, and, followed by the other two, he dashed out towards the foot of the staircase.

There was a muffled word of exclamation, a little stir among the hanging coats. With a slow stateliness, a feigned dignity intended for Bungay's eye alone, Wade and Jack lifted fold after fold of the coats hanging above the human form which by rights ought to top the two sturdy feet that were visible beneath the folds. The last fold yielded to Jack's touch, and then, instead of Bungay's chubby, laughing countenance, Jack Blanchard found himself staring into the crimson face of Phyllis Stayre; and in the hand of Phyllis Stayre there came the gleam of the tell-tale pair of scissors whose long, sharp points were still caught in the half-ripped lining of his sleeve.

"Phyllis!"

It was not often that Sidney's voice took on that tone. There was an instant's pause while Phyllis, angry and shamefaced and wholly at a loss for words, stood at bay. Then, turning with a half-smothered sob, she broke away and went speeding up the stairs.

The door of her room banged together with a force which waked the slumbering twins; but, just before

it closed, Phyllis heard come plainly up the stairs behind her Jack Blanchard's jolly laugh. For the second time that day, that laugh had been turned against her. And Phyllis, sobbing furiously and face down upon her bed, made up her girlish mind that henceforth and forever she would hate Jack Blanchard as only he deserved.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"ROB?"

Rob Argyle glanced up from the evening paper in his hand.

"Dad?"

"The game comes off, next Saturday."

Rob nodded.

"I inferred it from the context."

"Why didn't you mention it, then?"

"Turned coy, Dad, and waited for you. I knew you'd get around to it, some day. Besides, I wasn't sure I'd get through mumping in time."

His father laughed.

"It would have been ignominious; wouldn't it?" he asked. "Imagine Exeter's champion appearing at a Yale-Princeton game, all swollen up with mumps."

"Day would have had the worst of it, Dad, if we'd had to stay at home together," Rob suggested cheerily. "As it is, we're both of us presentable again."

"To my relief," his father assented. "You weren't a pretty trio. Well, what do you propose to do about it?"

"Smile at our looking-glasses, and thank the fates the party's over," Rob made prompt response, "Even Day must have had her fill by now."

"Poor child, yes. You brought disaster over a sorrowing community, Rob. But what do you propose to do about the game?"

"Go."

"Exactly. And then?"

"Come home, of course, shrieking for the winning side. As long as Harvard doesn't play, I don't care a rap who gets the luck. Shall you take up your car?"

"It is the easiest way. Then we can lunch on board, and be free to give our whole time and mind to getting to the field."

"Who is going?" Rob queried idly, as he dropped his paper and bent forward to assault the forestick.

"I can look out for ten," his father replied, watching with absent eye his son's yellow head and well-set shoulders. "Your mother has asked the Brownes; but only Amy and her mother can go. Then I thought it would be a good idea to take Jack along."

Rob nodded at the forestick.

"Good scheme, Dad! It's time he saw something of the kind. He is used to the sort of game that slops all over the field. Those Canadian fellows have no notion of a team. By the way, where is he now?"

"Where's who?" Day inquired, as she appeared upon the scene and plumped herself down on Rob's knee.

"Jack, you elephant. I say, Day, move over to the other knee. You weigh more than you used to, and this weather is making me gouty."

"Rob," his father spoke with sudden seriousness; "have you strained your leg again?"

With perfect tranquillity, Rob caught his sister as she essayed to rise, pulled her down upon the other knee and held her fast.

"Nothing to mention, Dad," he answered then. "James has been shampooing the stairs, to-day, and I slipped a little, when I came down to dinner. I'll be all right in the morning, so don't beetle your brows like that. Sit still, Aurora."

She laughed up into his face.

"I won't, if you call me that," she told him.

"It's your name," he reminded her. "You got it in baptism, with Aunt Aurora's tin teapot thrown in. But don't wriggle like that, you know; it makes me nervous."

"Something else makes me nervous, Rob."

"What's that?"

"You. I hate your having these strains; they always scare me."

"But this is nothing, really," he assured her.

Twisting about on his knee, she surveyed him anxiously.

"Truly, truly?" she asked. "I should die, if you were put to bed again."

His eyes denied the laugh on his lips. However, —

"We had some good times, Day," he reminded her.

"Better ones now," she said contentedly. "But do be careful, Rob."

"All right," Rob answered, with unexpected docility. "But do you happen to know where Jack is?"

Day shook her head.

"And I'm afraid I don't much care," she added luxuriously.

"Why, Day!"

"I know; it is very unregenerate of me. I think Jack is an adorable being and I truly do like to have him about. Still, it is fun to have you to myself. I haven't seen him since dinner, though. I supposed you had him at work, Daddy?" Her tone was interrogative.

"No; I saw him starting out somewhere, just after dinner," her father answered.

"Queer! It's not the night for any of his lessons," Day commented carelessly. "I wonder where he is; he generally tells us, when he's going out."

"I thought he seemed worried at the table," Mr. Argyle suggested.

Rob and Day exchanged glances. Sidney had no sooner gone away, that afternoon, taking Phyllis with her, than the brother and sister had decided that it would be best for all concerned, for Jack as well as Phyllis, that nothing should be said to their elders about Phyllis's sudden attack.

"But people are so horrid," Day said forlornly, after Jack had gone to his room. "First they say things without thinking, and, the next thing, they believe them. Amy Browne called Jack a brakeman first, and now it's that little wretch of a Phyllis Stayre. For my part, I don't care if he was news-boy; he's Jack Blanchard, all the same, and we know what he is. Still, I hate to have such fables get

about; they make it hard for Jack. Now he's here in the house, he is bound to see more people."

"Also they're bound to see him," Rob reminded her.

"Only they don't half look, when they have a notion like that in their heads," Day said shrewdly. "They're introduced, and nod, and go right on. They can't tell what he's like, that way."

And the discussion which had followed, had lasted so long that Rob had made ready for dinner in a mad haste which had resulted in his slip upon the stairs. Since then, he had been gritting his teeth together to hide the ache in his leg. Rob Argyle possessed his own share of pluck; but he did not take kindly to invalid ways. Just escaped from the ignominious woes of mumps, he was not minded to be laid on the shelf again to nurse a strain. For the next few days, he would walk but little and that little with exceeding circumspection. In that way, he hoped to avoid any discovery of his increased limp. If worse came to worst, he would take Day into his confidence, and together they would plot how he could escape parental vigilance. Day never fussed; she merely kept still and administered her coddlings when no one else was by.

Now, however, it seemed to Rob that the talk was skirting the edge of danger. Deftly he changed the subject away from strains and from Phyllis.

"Dad has just been talking about the game, Day," he observed.

"Really and truly! Are we going?"

Rob took advantage of her enthusiasm to slide to one edge of his chair, slide her down beside him and straighten out his aching leg.

"So he says."

Day turned to her father.

"How?"

"I shall take up the car."

"Good! And who in it?"

"Mrs. Browne and Amy, four of us, and Jack."

"And you counted for ten, Dad," Rob reminded him. "You have seven there. Who then?"

"Anybody you say for one, or even two. I thought I would like to keep a place for Mr. Browne, in case he turned up at the last minute. You'll have Jack to play with, Rob, and Day has Amy. You'll have to decide which of you will choose the extra person."

Rob nestled into the corner of his chair and stretched his long legs fireward.

"Not decide at all. We'd both like Sidney."

"May we, Daddy?" Day added.

"Of course. I thought likely you would want her. And why not ask that extraordinary young sister of hers, while you are about it?"

"Phil!"

"Phyllis Stayre!"

The two exclamations, emphatic and horrified, came simultaneously from the two corners of the great chair. Mr. Argyle laughed.

"Why not?"

"Daddy!" Day's tone was full of remonstrance. "Phil is — insupportable."

"What's the matter with her?" Mr. Argyle asked, with a tranquillity born of his utter ignorance of Phyllis's mental processes.

"Queer, and cranky, and dowdy."

"And porcupiggy," Rob supplemented. "She's always in a row, Dad. When she can't find anybody else to fight with, she gets up a shindy with herself, and storms about like a crazy hen. Truly, we don't want Phil."

"But I'll see to the child," Mr. Argyle said benevolently. "If she is as bad as you say, she probably doesn't get many invitations. I'd like her to have this one good time, and besides, for Sidney's sake, it would be well to ask her."

Rob shook his yellow head.

"That's where you missed it, Dad," he retorted grimly. "For Sidney's sake, it would be mighty well to leave Phil at home."

"She won't come, if we do ask her," Day said hopefully.

"Why not?"

"Because," Day felt that the new emergency demanded that she reveal half the secret of the afternoon's fray; "because she had a fuss here, to-day, and stamped out of the house on her heels."

"Sorry," Mr. Argyle made brief comment. "It's not good manners to have your friends have fusses

in your own house. No matter, though; I'll ask the child, myself."

Early the next morning, Sidney, with Bungay at her heels, came down to the dining-room to give her customary glance about the table. In a family so large as theirs, it was manifestly impossible for one servant to do all things well, and Mary's strength and ability both were finite. Accordingly, certain duties overflowed upon the older girls, and to Phyllis's share fell the setting of the table. Phyllis was strictly utilitarian. Granted that a knife would cut, she cared nothing for its shape and material. Granted that a fork would pick things up, she cared nothing for its size. One knife and fork, she averred, were enough for any one mortal at any one meal. Furthermore, she saw no need of uniformity in choosing that one, while the smaller items of pepper, salt and napkins strayed about the cloth, as fancy bade or the demands of haste made needful. As result, Sidney had found it well to inspect the table before each meal, and, with a deft touch here and there, to bring order out of seeming chaos.

On this particular Sunday morning, the chaos was worse than ever. For a few moments, Sidney toiled industriously to make good the gaps in Phyllis's preparations. Then, going to the hall, she picked up the little heap of morning mail and, sorting it in her hands, she moved back into the dining-room. One letter for Phyllis caught her eye by reason of its bold handwriting, and she tossed it down on her

sister's napkin. Then she opened her own one letter, addressed in the dashing hand she had long since learned to know as Rob Argyle's. She looked up delightedly, as Wade entered the room.

"Wade, it's too joyous!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Argyle is taking his private car up to the game, and Rob and Day have asked me to go with them."

The younger boys cast themselves upon her in a clamour of questionings, and, for a few minutes, all the tongues but one wagged busily.

"Those Brownes are going. You remember Amy, Wade?" Sidney said, with a little grimace of disgust. "And Rob says Jack will go, too. Isn't it lovely? Don't you envy me?" Then she turned to Phyllis, who was eating oatmeal with an air of stolid unconcern. "Did you find your letter, Phil?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

In leisurely fashion, Phyllis scraped up the cream in the bottom of her dish.

"It was a letter to me," she said then.

"I saw the address," Sidney reminded her. "Who wrote it?"

"A friend of mine." Phyllis's jaw shut with a snap.

Wade laughed.

"I hope it was good news, Phil," he remarked, as he chipped the end of his egg.

"Good enough, I suppose. No, thank you. I don't care for any more. May I be excused?"

And Phyllis, with the same cloudy brow she had worn since the previous afternoon, slipped sideways out of her chair and left the room.

And Wade's eyes, across the table, met those of Sidney with a smile. Like Rob and Day, both Sidney and Wade had resolved to say nothing to their elders about Phyllis's latest freak.

The next Saturday was a day of thousands, warm and bright and soft with the golden and purple haze of late November. To Sidney Stayre, riding eastward along the edge of the Sound, it seemed all like a bit out of some fairy tale: the luxurious private car, the uniformed servants, the gay talk and the pretty clothes. Amy and Day were gossiping in one corner; Rob had departed for a leisurely tour of the train, finding friends at every turn, and Sidney for the moment sat alone, looking out across the stretches of golden marshland. The girl was full of dreamy content. Her welcome had been exuberant. Rob himself had come in the cab which had called for her, and Day had greeted her with open arms, while Amy Browne, already on the step of the car, had beamed upon her cordially. An added source of content lay in her own new winter gown of dark green cloth which, simple as it was, yet had won glances of approval from them all.

Sidney, although temporarily deserted, had no sense of being left out in the cold. Instead of that, she was not sorry to have a moment to herself to think over the details of her departure: her father's

pleasure in her going, her mother's insistent loan of her best handkerchief, Bungay's farewell hug, and Wade's bright face as he had put her into the cab. Then, as the cab had rolled away, one black spot came across the sunshine. Sidney had raised her eyes to the house to see Phyllis, who had been invisible at breakfast, peering out from an upper window with gloomy face and red-rimmed eyes. Sidney wondered uneasily what could have gone wrong with the girl, so early in the morning. Then she had forgotten Phyllis in Rob's eager greeting.

"Oh, I say," Rob said, as the cab stopped at the curb outside the station; "my leg's gone up again; but don't make any comments, please. I'm hoping that the heads of the house won't notice it. No," he added, in answer to her questioning look; "it's nothing. It won't last. I only don't want to get laid up again." And he stiffened himself for the long walk out the platform.

Sidney was thinking of it now, as she sat staring out across the level marshland, contrasting Rob's bright, buoyant pluck with Phyllis's gloom. She roused herself, however, as Jack came sauntering down the car and halted at her side.

"Seems like old times, to be riding off like this," he observed gayly; "only I never had such quarters then. Is Rob coming back?"

"Sit down," she bade him. "Tell me, did my mending hold together?"

Laughing, he nodded.

"Like adamant. How is my young friend?"

"In the dumps."

Jack raised his brows.

"Again?"

"Still, you'd better say," Sidney corrected. "She has been in mental dogdays for a week."

"What now?"

All of a sudden Sidney's mirth left her, and she gave a tired sigh.

"I wish I knew," she said.

Later, that day, she was destined to find out the cause, in part at least, of Phyllis's morning gloom. One by one, and each more golden than the last, the hours had slipped away, bearing with them in swift procession the merry journey, the luncheon, the wild scramble to get a carriage for the field, a scramble when Sidney, professing to twist her ankle, had demanded the support of Rob's arm to the curb, the wilder excitement of the close-fought game. It was not until they were once more seated in the Argyle car that Sidney had more than an occasional word with her host. Then his word took her by surprise.

"Remember," he said, as he rose to give place to his son who was obviously waiting to move in; "remember to tell your sister how sorry we were not to have her with us."

Sidney looked slightly mystified. It was not like Mr. Argyle, as she had known him, to make such speeches as this for mere effect.

"Phyllis would have loved to come," she said guardedly.

"Then why didn't she?"

Sidney coloured hotly. Phyllis was notoriously eccentric. Still, she was a Stayre, and the Stayres, as a rule, did not annex themselves, unasked, to expeditions such as this.

"Why, because —" she faltered.

Mr. Argyle dropped back again into his seat, to Rob's no small disgust.

"Because what?" he queried kindly, at a loss to explain Sidney's manifest embarrassment.

The embarrassment deepened.

"Because she wasn't invited," Sidney blurted out, in desperation at being so completely cornered.

It was Mr. Argyle's turn to look mystified.

"But I invited her, myself," he said.

"Really?"

"Didn't she tell you?"

"No; nor anybody else," Sidney answered shortly, in a sudden wave of acute disgust. Then she straightened in her chair. "Was it a great square letter that came to her, Sunday morning?" she demanded.

"Let me see. Yes."

Sidney sank back again in her chair.

"How exactly like Phyllis!" she said.

And, meanwhile, Wade Winthrop was sitting on the edge of Phyllis's bed, with one strong, slim hand upon her shaking shoulders.

All the night before, and all that day, Wade had suspected something was amiss with his young cousin. For the past twenty-four hours, Phyllis had kept herself out of the way as much as possible. When she had been visible, she had alternately gloomed and glowered. And Wade, looking on and viewing the girl in the light of his widening experience of human life, had come to the conclusion that something was seriously wrong. As a rule, a girl of fourteen only glowered out upon the world in seasons of strife. To Wade's mind, it mattered nothing whether the strife were with herself or with her fellow beings. Constant war was bad for a fourteen-year-old girl; it should be ended at any cost. During the past two or three months, Wade had eyed his young cousin keenly. Liking her not at all, he yet had seen, beneath her thorns, possible lines of loveliness which as yet were all undeveloped. His first temptation had been to let her go her way, to leave her development to other hands than his. Then, one day, he had caught her in tears, and Wade was tender-hearted. From that hour on, he had made systematic effort to find a side of Phyllis on which, not yet overgrown with thorns, she could be safely handled. Once, and yet again, and still again, he had thought to discover that side. He had withdrawn from that contact, tingling and sore.

At noon, that day, Phyllis had worn the chastened brow of a mediaeval saint, her nose had been pink, her voice was in a minor key, husky and plaintive. True to her customary method, she had found vent for her

sorrows by reducing the twins to a condition of similar chastening, by reason of her criticism upon their habits. They had left the table, arm in arm, and sniffing grievously upon their unoccupied sleeves; and Phyllis had turned her attention to Bungay whose griefs were never known to express themselves in anything so moderate as a sniffle. Wade had smiled inscrutably to himself, raised his brows and excused himself at the earliest possible moment. On his way down town, once again he had seriously weighed the relative desirability of Sidney's society and exemption from Sidney's younger sister.

Nevertheless, he came up early from the office, that afternoon; and, at a corner stair, he halted for a posy of late chrysanthemums. In spite of it all, he was sorry for Phyllis. Because her bad times were of her own making, they were none the less bad, for all that. His key clicked sharply in the door. Then,—

“Oh, Phil!” he called.

“Hullo!” Bungay observed, from his seat astride of the newel post.

“Hullo, Bungay! Have you seen Phil?”

“I d' know. The man came for the gas,” Bungay assured him discursively.

“All right. But has Phyllis gone out?”

Bungay bounced rapturously up and down on his improvised steed.

“Gee! Haw! Go 'long!” he adjured it. “‘Trot, trot to —’ No. There's her hat.”

“Where is she, then?”

Bungay let go his shoestring bridle long enough to point vaguely towards the ceiling.

"In her room? Go call her."

"Don't däss," Bungay made laconic answer.

"Why not?"

"She'll hit me." Bungay suddenly recalled his next-day Bible lesson which had been driven into him, that noon. "She'll smite me, hip and thigh. Go 'lang!"

And Wade took to himself the instructions levelled at the wooden steed, and mounted up the stairs.

"Oh, Phil!" he said again, outside the door.

There was no response, and he repeated his call. This time, he heard a muffled reply.

"G' way," it sounded like.

"But it's I, Wade."

"Don't care."

"I've brought you some flowers."

"Give 'em to Sidney, then." The words were not encouraging; but the tone was a shade less gruff.

"But I bought them for you."

"Don't want them." The voice came through a muffling bank of pillows.

"What did you say?"

"I — said — I — did — not — want — them." The next minute, Phyllis's head was down again, and she was sobbing in good earnest.

Wade hesitated for a moment, smiled slightly, but with no mirth; then he pushed open the door and walked into the room.

"Phil," he asked quietly; "what's the matter?"

"Everything," she wailed comprehensively. Then, ostrich-like, she sought to bury her head among the pillows.

"What?"

"I hate everybody, and everybody hates me," she wailed again, lifting her head for an instant, then burrowing it beneath the topmost pillow.

For one single, unregenerate instant, Wade longed to add a great *Amen* to her statement. Then he relented. Phyllis, long, lanky and homely, was not an attractive sight, as she lay face down upon her roughened bed. Nevertheless, the young man found something rather pitiful in her abject abandonment of woe. He pitied, and the tact which had helped him to his professional success now stood him in good stead. He made two long steps across to the bed, sat down on its edge and slid one strong arm under the girl's shaking body.

"Tell me all about it, Phil," he urged her. "Things always get better in the telling."

Phyllis yielded to his soothing touch, and somewhat of her sobbing ceased.

"It's just what I said," she made despairing answer at last. "Nobody likes me, and I've fought with everybody, and I couldn't go to the game."

"The game?"

There came a sudden ring of hostile pride in the girl's tone.

"Yes. Why not, as well as Sidney? Mr. Argyle asked me to go. His note is on the table now."

"Then why didn't you go, Phil?"

She sniffed, but more in disdain than grief.

"Do you suppose I'd have gone in the crowd with Rob and that Jack Blanchard?"

"Why not?"

"Because I've fought with them, and they don't like me. Nobody likes me, I keep telling you."

There was a little pause. Then Wade spoke.

"Phil," he said slowly; "you've made a good deal of a mess of things. In fact, it seems to be a way you have. What makes you do it, child?"

Turning slightly, Phyllis stared up into the kind brown eyes that were watching her intently. Above the eyes, the brown hair was crossed with an occasional silver thread. Below them, the lips showed that life had not been all sunshine for Wade Winthrop; but that he had learned to smile in sunshine or in cloud. And Wade had never spoken to her in just that tone before. The distrust in the girl's gray eyes turned to pleading.

"I suppose I am born so," she said curtly; but there was now no antagonism in her voice.

He shook his head.

"You aren't. Nobody is. If you were, it would be no excuse, though. Now see here, Phil, you're my cousin. I'd like to be fond of you, to be chums with you; but you won't let me. I'd like to be proud of you, not ashamed as I was, the other night when you slashed Jack's coat. I don't know what began it, and I don't want to know. Jack is a gentleman,

though, and I am sure he never was to blame. And you say you've fought with Rob and Day, too, so you wouldn't go with them to the game. Poor little soul! Your punishment comes soon and heavy." He watched her for a moment, as she sat with her hot and swollen face buried in the cool, bright blossoms he had brought. Then he went on, "Phil, I'm no deacon; I hate to preach. Still, you know, punishment generally does come, child. There are only two things for you to do. Either shut your teeth and take it without whimpering; or else see that you don't bring it down on yourself in the first place. You've had a bad day of it; but, after all, it is a good deal your own fault."

"Wade," Phyllis of a sudden abandoned her flowers and faced him steadily; "I like the way you talk. You hit hard; but you're honest, and don't dodge. It's — it is my fault, I know."

"Then," as he spoke, Wade rose and switched the lights on to the darkening room. Returning to the bed, he sat down once more at Phyllis's side. "Then," he said cheerily; "let's take hold of hands, Phil, and see if we can't go to work to stop it off, right now."

And Phyllis, without an instant's hesitation, placed her hand, flowers and all, in his.

CHAPTER TWELVE

"DO you think I ought to go, Wade?" Sidney asked doubtfully.

"Why not?" he questioned.

"Why?" she made counter question.

"Because you are invited."

"That doesn't signify anything."

"Only that you are wanted."

"Duty," Sidney suggested disdainfully.

"No matter, so long as you are wanted."

"But I don't care to be taken like a pill," she rebelled.

"Some pills are wholesome."

"I'm not," she said, with a swift antagonism which reminded him of Phyllis. "I always disagree with people."

"Especially me?"

"You're the one exception. And I was too much for you at first. You know they said I managed you till you didn't dare say your soul was your own," she reminded him audaciously. "But, truly, Wade, I don't see any need of my going."

Plunging his hands into his overcoat pockets, Wade tramped on at her side without speaking.

"Do you?" she urged him.

"I do, if you want my opinion."

Careless of who saw her, she took one hand out of her muff and passed it through his arm.

"What else do you suppose I wanted, when I telephoned down that I was coming to walk home with you?" she demanded.

Wade laughed.

"If I know girls —"

"You don't; you only think you do," Sidney cut in. "What then?"

"If I know girls, your intention was to ask my advice and then take your own," Wade observed, with unruffled calm.

"How mean of you! Don't I always take your advice, I'd like to know? But now listen, Wade. I truly don't see any sense in mixing things."

"As for instance?" he queried, as they halted on the curb for a line of cars to pass.

"Sets."

"Bedroom, or what you girls term *lingerie*?" he inquired.

"Wade! How horrid of you!" she rebuked him. "I mean social sets, of course. You see, it's this way. Day and I are friends, good friends. We go to each other's houses, back and forth and all the time. We like each other, and we never fight. Still, Day has her friends, and I have mine, and the two sets don't know each other from Adam. There's no reason that they should. My friends are as nice as hers; they like her, when they meet her; but that's

no reason they should begin asking her to their parties."

"Unless they happen to want her," Wade suggested dryly.

"But they don't, and Amy Browne doesn't want me. I know perfectly well why it was she asked me now."

"What then?" Wade was smiling less at the subject than at his cousin's animated face. Sidney Stayre was no actual beauty; nevertheless, in her dark green gown and hat, her best gown and hat donned in honour of her cousin's company, she possessed far more than her due share of comeliness.

"Day made her."

"Knowing Day, I doubt it."

Sidney laughed.

"You weren't behind the scenes, that first night at Heatherleigh. Day put me to bed; then she went off and had it out with those two girls. They had been horridly rude to Jack and me; next day, they were a pair of cooing doves. I've seen Amy Browne a dozen times since then, and she has been as lovely as a marble angel, and just about as hearty. As for Jack, she speaks to him when she's in the house, or when Rob is with him. Now she is giving this large party and — Well, I don't want to go."

"You'll have a good time."

"Don't be too sure."

"Rob will see to that," Wade predicted.

"Rob isn't going."

"No? Why is that?"

Sidney wrinkled her brows.

"I wish I really knew. He says it's because he has another engagement; but I'm afraid it is another reason."

Wade looked down at her sharply.

"Nothing wrong, Sidney?"

She laughed out in sudden scorn.

"Not with his morals, Wade; that's not Rob Argyle. But — haven't you noticed how much more he is limping, nowadays?"

"I hadn't thought."

"It may be nothing," Sidney said hastily. "Very likely I imagine it. Of course, I watch him, all the time; I suppose we all do, for the matter of that. Anyway, he's not going to Amy's party. I don't know that I wonder, as long as he isn't dancing now."

"Is that the reason you don't want to go?" her cousin asked half-jealously.

"What nonsense! I like Rob; but I can manage to have some fun without him, even if he is a dear old boy. But now, Wade, you see here. I don't know Amy's friends, any but one or two of them. I should be a stranger to them all; I shouldn't know the things they talk about and all that. If Rob were there, he would look out for me. Day can't; she's another girl. And, besides—" Sidney hesitated and then stuck fast.

"Proceed," he bade her lightly.

"It's not so easy," she said slowly. "I couldn't; only I want your help. You see, Wade, it's this way. My father and mother both are pleased about my being asked. They know who Amy is, and her father, and they want me to go. My mother really is insisting on it, and — I can't," she ended abruptly.

"I don't see why."

"Because," she said bravely, though her very ears were hot; "because I haven't one thing to wear, not one thing. I won't go shabby, and have Day ashamed of me. Neither will I ask my father for a new gown. There are lots of us children to look out for, and, if I go into college, next year, he will have all he can do to keep me there. Wade," she laid her hand upon his arm once more; "I want you to keep still about this, and fight on my side. Make mother think you believe it would be foolish for me to go."

"But I don't, Tids. I hate to have you give it up."

"Truly I don't mind," she said quickly; "not half so much as I should mind going there shabby, or in a frock I couldn't afford. At best, I should be an outsider. I don't really belong in that set; I'm better off inside my own. Day is a dear to want me, and Amy is nice to take me in. Still, I can't be taken."

"But really, Sidney, haven't you something you could wear?" Wade protested blankly.

"Not a dud."

"Where's the thing you wore, that night at Heatherleigh?"

"Split open at the shoulder, and made over for one of the twins." Sidney laughed at his worried face. Then she added coaxingly, "Now be a dear old boy, Wadeikins, and convince mother that it's best I shouldn't go."

December had come now, and with it the first snowfall. The air bit sharply at their ears, and the wheels squeaked coldly over the white roadway, as the two cousins left the Avenue and turned westward. As happened now and then, Sidney had telephoned down to Wade, that afternoon, to tell him of her intention to drop in on him, so that they might have the long walk home together; and Wade, who now and then regretted his cousin's growing absorption in the Argyles, had hailed the suggestion with supreme content. Heart whole and fancy free, as yet Wade Winthrop was finding his best comradeship with his young cousin. Phyllis, thorns and all, he had accepted as a sacred charge, since chance and his own tact had broken down for him the barriers of her wayward reserve. Phyllis was his duty; Sidney his pleasure, pure and unalloyed. The two cousins never clashed, never faced awkward pauses, never wearied of the other's company. Wade's brow was serenely content as, with Sidney at his side, he crossed Washington Square, came out under the Arch and turned northward along the Avenue which, like a vast backbone, divides the city's left hand from its right.

For many blocks on end, they had tramped on at a

rapid pace, talking gayly of this thing and of that. Then, as they left the shops behind them and came to the streets where trade ceases and where life begins, to where the lights gleamed out from the great hotels and where the carriages, whirling to and fro, showed glimpses of bright faces and brave toilettes within, then at last Sidney had come to the subject which had been uppermost in her mind. They were still arguing the question, when Bungay hailed them from his own top step.

"Phil," Wade inquired abruptly, that night, "what do girls wear to parties?"

Phyllis, abandoning her book, stared up at Wade as if he had suddenly gone demented.

"Me? I? How should I know?" she asked blankly.

Wade cast a wholly humorous glance at her plain dark frock.

"By the light of faith, I suppose. The way girls do know things."

"What on earth do you want to know for?" she asked suspiciously.

Wade laughed.

"Masculine curiosity."

Phyllis's brow cleared.

"Oh, for your paper, I suppose," she said, with a graciousness which had come to her since the night Wade had walked in upon her woe. "Well, I'm not sure I can tell you."

"You might make a try at it," he suggested.

"Hm! A large party, or a small one?" she questioned, her head on one side and her spectacles sliding down the bridge of her long nose.

"Large."

"How old a girl?"

"Oh," Wade appeared to be pondering the question; "somewhere about Sidney's age."

Phyllis pushed her spectacles into position, and stared up at Wade with the round-eyed shrewdness of some wise old parrot.

"I suppose you're trying to get your hand in as society reporter," she said scathingly. "You'd better take to writing fashion notes, then, to get your materials ready. I thought you were made for better things."

"So I am. But the girl?" he reminded her.

However, Phyllis had gone off on a new tangent.

"Oh, I know." She sat up alertly. "You're writing a novel, and you don't know how to dress the heroine. Let's see! A large party, and the girl about seventeen? I'd put her in a rose-coloured satin with flounces of cloth-of-silver, and a fan of silver lace. I'd give her silver slippers, and a knot of pearls in her hair, too. I think that would be just lovely."

And Wade, while he smiled assent to her enthusiasm, resolved to make appeal to Day. On more than one occasion heretofore, he had found that Day could be relied upon to keep her council.

At Wade's earnest request, Sidney had agreed to

take one more day to ponder the matter of her invitation. She had assented, merely for the sake of pacifying her cousin, since her own mind was fully made up to refuse to go. As Sidney had said, she did not really belong to this new set of which, by way of Day and Amy, she was gaining an occasional glimpse. She numbered her own friends by hordes, for Sidney Stayre, though never courting popularity, possessed the trick of winning liking and then love by reason of her practical, downright, unselfish sense. Both in her own neighbourhood and in her school, she had loyal and congenial friends, friends who shared her tastes and whose way of life she could afford. For the most part, they were daughters and sons of professional men, children of homes where refinement was wholly independent of great wealth. In Day's set, it was all different. Sidney's friends rode in the street cars, Day's in their own carriages; and their pleasures were as different as the way in which they did their errands. Even apart from the matter of clothes, Sidney would be an alien among them. Their chatter was of things of which she lacked all personal knowledge. It was not that the girl was envious; it was merely that she told herself, as she had told her cousin, that there was no especial sense in trying to mix things.

Her chin on her fists, she was pondering the matter, late the next afternoon, wondering why it was that, with Day and Rob and in the Argyle home, she never felt an alien, although her father had assured her

that, where the Argyles led, the Brownes could only follow. With Day, there was never any question; while, as for Rob, he was like another Stayre, only — Sidney smiled to herself — like the top one of the flight. Then she wrinkled her brows suddenly. It was three weeks since the game, and Rob's walk still showed that something was amiss. She wondered that his parents and Day could be so blind as not to see it. He had been there, only the night before. His laugh had been as buoyant as ever; but Sidney had been shocked, when she saw the heavy drag of his foot as he came forward to meet her. She half resolved, at the earliest opportunity, to break her word and to speak of the matter to Jack Blanchard. In the same house with Rob, Jack could contrive to see that his friend took the care of himself which Rob was so prone to disregard.

A buzz of the doorbell aroused her, and she glanced out of the front window. A motor wagon, trim and shiny, was drawn up before the door, and a uniformed porter was just lifting out a great square box. The name on the wagon conveyed nothing to Sidney; but the address was on Fifth Avenue, and she smiled a little.

"What an extravagant boy Wade is!" she said to herself. "I'm glad I don't have to pay his tailor bills. It's a good thing his father left him a small fortune." And then, for Mary was busy in the kitchen and Phyllis was out, she went to the door to take in the box.

"Miss Stayre?" the man said interrogatively.

"I am Miss Stayre."

The man shoved the box into Sidney's hands.

"All right. Here's your dress." And, with a nod, he was gone.

The door swung together to shut out the frosty twilight. Then, alone in the darkening hall, Sidney stood still, hugging the great box in her arms.

"It's Wade," she said, and a big round tear slid down her nose. The tear, though, was not for her own pleased girlish vanity, but rather of gratitude for her cousin's love.

She was still standing there, clasping the box in her embrace, when the bell rang once more. Sure that it was Wade, she freed one arm to open the door; but, instead of Wade upon the threshold, she found Rob, his shoulders white with the snow which was beginning to fall.

"The coffin of the Prophet!" he ejaculated, as he shook himself free of his coat. "What's the bonbon box, Sidney?"

Her answering laugh was a bit hysterical.

"It's Wade."

Rob, stick in hand, perambulated around her in a circle.

"You don't say so! Poor fellow, he must be badly smashed, to come home in such a shape as that!" he observed sympathetically. "Open him up, Sidney, and let me take a look at him. For the life of me, I can't see how they've folded him up."

"I don't mean he's inside here," Sidney explained, breathless with nervous mirth. "I think he's ordered a gown for me for Amy's party."

"What for?" Rob asked bluntly. "You generally manage to get your own gowns up alone."

Sidney blushed scarlet. Then she said honestly, —

"I didn't have a thing I could wear, and I didn't mean to go. I told Wade about it, and now this box has come. The man said it was a dress. If it is, I am sure it's Wade."

"How jolly of Wade!" Rob said, with a brotherly interest which Sidney was quick to feel and like. Then he fished in a series of pockets and brought out his knife. "Let's get it open and take a look," he advised her practically.

The cords tightened against the sharp blades of the knife, tightened, snapped, and fell back, rattling on the box. Rob lifted the cover, came on a layer of silver paper, lifted the silver and came upon folds on folds of white tissue paper.

"They've done it up for keeps," he announced then. "Pitch in, Sidney, and haul out your plum. By Jove, here's the card!" And he handed to Sidney a card on which was neatly printed *From a little brother of Santa Claus*.

Sidney seized the card, and apparently forgot the box, while she stood staring at the bit of pasteboard in her hand. Rob cleared his throat once or twice to remind her of his presence, then yielded to his curiosity, parted the folds of paper and peered in.

"By Jove!" he said again, and went hurrying through the hall.

Sidney roused herself.

"Where are you going, Rob?" she demanded.

"To the telephone."

"What for?"

Rob smiled languishingly backward over his shoulder.

"To tell Amy I'm coming, after all. I'll call for you at any time you say."

It was growing late, the night of Amy's party, when the cab stopped at the Stayres' door and Rob brought Sidney up the steps. Late as it was, however, the girl found Wade standing in the hall.

"Was it a good time?" he asked, as soon as the door had closed upon Rob's departing heels.

"Beautiful!"

"And you weren't sorry you went?"

For answer, she let her cloak slide to the floor, and turned herself about for his approval.

"Sorry! In such a gown! But, Wade —"

He understood the little pause, understood, too, the break in her gay young voice. Regardless of her finery, he threw his arm across her shoulders and turned her face to his.

"Tids," he said gravely then; "once upon a time, there was a sorry fellow with a pair of lungs and a temper. He hated most things and all people, especially himself. And then there was a little cousin who came from nowhere and was jolly; and then he

didn't hate things any more. The debt will always be on my side, Tids; but this wasn't a debt at all, only just a little something to remind you that your old cousin likes you rather well."

But Sidney could not speak. Instead, she stood for a moment, looking up into the eyes above her own. Then, with a little caressing gesture which was alien to her gay self-reliance, she turned suddenly and rested her bright hair against his shoulder.

"Wade, you always were a dear," was all she said.

For a moment, he held her close, with the deeper affection which belongs to undemonstrative natures such as theirs. Then gently he released her, and stood gazing down at her in manifest approval. And well he might approve! Dressed as she had never been before in all her life, flushed with excitement and alight with her happy love for her cousin, Sidney Stayre, in her soft white frock, was enjoying her hour of actual beauty, yet was as unconscious as a little child that she could be good to look upon. Wade's gaze moved over her from the top of her bright brown hair to the tip of her white slipper. Then, smiling, he bent forward and lifted her glove to his lips. The gesture was of quaint chivalry; not so his words.

"Tids, you are a comfortable sort of creature," he remarked. "Now do sit down and tell me all about it."

And Sidney, nothing loath, dropped down beside him upon the worn old sofa in the hall.

"After all," she said at length, as she rose to go up-stairs; "next to you, you extravagant boy, I owe my good time to Rob. He wasn't going; some other people called for Day. Then, just because I decided to go, after I had said I shouldn't, he sent word to Amy that he had changed his mind. Of course, he couldn't dance; but he looked out for me and introduced all his nicest friends. It made all the difference in the world to me, their knowing he was with me. Wade," she turned back to him abruptly; "what have I done to get such friends?"

"Just been yourself, Tids," he assured her calmly.

Then he switched off the lights and drove her away to bed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JACK BLANCHARD rose, buttoned his coat and stood at attention. The gesture, left over from the days when, a mere boy in years, if not in character, he had worn the Queen's uniform, suited his wide shoulders and keen face.

"I'll see what I can do," he said briefly.

Sidney sat still, and stared up at him with thoughtful eyes.

"And you'll make him understand that you spoke of it first," she urged.

"Surely. I fancy it won't be necessary, though. Rob has known you longer than I have."

Sidney was too much in earnest just now to blush at the implied praise. Besides, Jack's manner was always as downright as her own.

"Has he said anything to you about it?"

"Not a word."

"But you've noticed it?"

Jack nodded.

"Since ever so long now. I don't know when it first struck me he wasn't walking as well. I think Day sees it, too."

"I wish he wouldn't let it go," Sidney said restively. "A little neglect can do such harm, and he was getting on so well."

Jack took a turn across the floor, came back and halted at Sidney's side.

"I know. And yet, poor chap, no wonder he hates to lie up. The doctor might put him to bed again, you know. What began it?"

"He slipped, coming down the stairs. It's a shame to make him live on those bare floors, anyway," Sidney made impatient answer. "He didn't say much about it at home, and, ever since, he has been shutting his teeth and trying to walk even, so nobody should find it out."

Jack nodded again.

"I know. I caught him, one day when he thought no one was about. Since then, I've watched him. He stiffens himself all over, before he starts to move. He's not going out so much, either."

"Oh, dear!" Sidney said disconsolately. "What can we do? It's not my place to go to his mother. Rob would never forgive me, if I mixed up in his concerns."

"No," Jack made thoughtful reply. "And I'm not sure I would, either, in his place."

Impatiently Sidney rose and stood facing him.

"Can't you do something?" she protested. "You're not a girl."

Jack laughed, as he looked at her intrepid face and figure, unconscious of self as any boy.

"I don't see what difference that makes," he objected.

"You would, if you were under the weather, or in bad luck," Sidney returned a little hotly. "You

take us girls for good-weather friends; when things go wrong, you want another boy."

Keen, clean, kind, Jack's eyes looked into hers. Then he made answer, grave and downright as before, —

"It depends on the girl, Miss Sidney. I rather fancy that, if I were down on my luck, I should come to you for help — and get it."

She held out her hand, with a gesture of frank liking.

"Thank you," she answered. "I wish you would; only I hope the time will never come."

And, in the meantime, Day was anticipating Jack's promised talk with Rob.

It was the week before Christmas and, contrary to their custom, the New York streets were buried in heaps of snow which, falling all the day and night before, had baffled the efforts of the city fathers to have it cleared away. All morning long and all the afternoon, the laden carts had trundled to the rivers, dumped their loads and rattled emptily back again to be filled once more. Still, however, the snow lay deep and white and glistening above the up-town streets. Down town, already the rushing traffic had trodden it to a sodden mass of chilly mud, black and wet and sticky as pitch. In the turmoil of those streets, the beauty of winter could come but rarely, and, coming, it could not endure. Only the crystal sky, seen in narrow stripes between the cañon-like walls of the lofty buildings, and the icy

wind sweeping up from the river could show to the down-town world that winter was in the land.

Up town, however, it was different. The streets still stretched away in long white ribbons, and the snowy open spaces of the Park gleamed back at the crystal spaces of the sky.

"It's not Canada, by any means; but it will pass," Rob had said to Day, when she came in, that noon. "Let's go out to the Bronx. It may be our one sleigh ride of the winter."

Day had demurred. Her Christmas shopping was still to do, and there were lessons for the morrow. Then, watching Rob's disappointed face, she yielded and turned her half-formed excuses into enthusiastic assent to her brother's plan.

Throughout the long afternoon, Day had been even gayer than her wont. Few girls could have kept from gayety, for Rob was in one of his most buoyant moods, and Rob, under such conditions, was a comrade second to none. But at last, as the snow before them was turning from gold to bluish gray, Rob, with a deft twist of his hand, brought the horses to a walk and turned to speak to Day. To his surprise, her eyes were fixed upon him steadily, and there was a look of dull alarm in their brown depths.

"What is it, Day?" he asked her.

For a moment, she snuggled closer to his side, until her gray fur coat was pressed hard against his shoulder.

"Rob," she said steadily; "I want you to tell me something, tell me honestly."

"What's that?"

"Are you walking as well as you did?"

The question took him by surprise. Like Sidney, he too had thought Day blind.

"Well, no."

"I thought not. Nor as much?"

"Not quite."

"Why?" In vain she tried to hold the fear out of her voice.

Reassuringly he passed one arm around her waist, transferring, as he did so, the reins into his other hand.

"Because it hurts," he replied then laconically.

"Much?"

"Not the way it did at first. More than it has done lately."

"What did it?"

"I slipped on the stairs, one night, and gave myself a twist. Don't worry, Day. It really wasn't much."

Day's cheeks were growing whiter.

"Does mother know?"

Rob shook his head.

"She'd only worry."

"Nor the doctor?"

"What's the use?"

"Everything. Rob, you must tell him."

"But I don't want to, Day. I'm afraid of consequences." As he spoke, he laughed uneasily.

She mistook his meaning, and her breath came short with sudden fear.

"Rob!" Her hands shut on a fold of his fur-lined coat. "Do you think it's something that — will last?"

"Not a bit of it, dear," he answered reassuringly, for he read the terror in her face and voice. "I am taking care of it, and it will be all right in time. If I went to him, though, he might be in a hurry to put me right, and send me off to bed."

"But it would be over sooner," she urged him.

"And not half so pleasantly. Let me have my way, Day," and his voice was urgent. "I hate to be knocked out of all the fun just now. I'm taking care of it, and doing all the things he'd tell me to do. If you watched me, you would see how little walking I really do. I'm staying out of most things; I suppose I had no business to go to Amy's party. Still, one wants a little frivolity now and then."

The gray fur coat pressed even closer. Then Day said slowly, —

"Yes, I know. It's horrid, Rob; but I truly wish—"

Rob laughed, and shook his head.

"I'd see his worship? But I don't want to go to bed."

"Perhaps he wouldn't put you there," Day made hopeful suggestion, for she felt the drop in Rob's gay voice.

The drop came again, as Rob gathered up the lines and turned the horses' heads towards home.

"Yes, Day, I am afraid he would."

"What do you think I ought to do?" Day said to Jack, that night.

He had come into the parlour to find her pacing, pacing the floor, her brow clouded and her lips unsteady.

"Where's Rob?" he had demanded.

"Up in his room." Then, with a sudden outburst of girlish confidence, she had turned to Jack for sympathy and counsel.

And Jack had heard her to the end, without interruption or comment, nodding slightly now and then as he stood facing her upon the rug.

"I think some one ought to tell the doctor," he answered then.

"You don't mean me?" Day's question was appealing. Now that she had spoken out, she realized all at once how much she was relying upon Jack's judgment.

He hesitated. Then he shook his head.

"No; it's not your place. It must be done, though. Rob's not a baby; he must do it for himself."

Day turned pitiful.

"Poor old Rob! He does hate it so, and I'm not sure I wonder."

Jack's eyes were very kind; but they never wavered.

"That's no reason he should funk."

Day flashed into sudden wrath.

"Rob's no coward," she said hotly.

"Not generally; but now —"

"Now?" she prodded him, as he paused.

"Now," Jack said gravely; "I rather think he is."

If eyes could stab, Jack would have fallen on the floor before Day's glance. Then she lifted her head proudly.

"Is this what you call being Rob's friend?" she demanded scornfully.

"Yes. It is." The answer came in two crisp sentences.

"To be slandering him to his sister?" The second question came with still more haughtiness.

Jack winced, but did not falter.

"To his sister sooner than to any stranger. I shall say the same thing to Rob."

"That he's a coward and a sneak?" Day bit her lip abruptly, to hide its angry quivering.

"Coward, yes. Sneak, no. Rob doesn't know the meaning of the word."

"Nor coward, either," Day answered sharply. "Rob has borne everything you can think of, and never made a whimper."

"I know. No fellow could have been more plucky than he has been. That's the very reason I hate to see him spoil his record now."

"I don't see how he is spoiling it at all." Day's voice threatened to grow sullen.

Jack's answer came directly and direct.

"By finking a few days in bed, for the sake of keeping in the fun."

"Who wouldn't?" Day demanded. "I hate a person who goes to bed for nothing."

"So do I. They make me long to —" Jack laughed a little; "to dynamite them. But Rob's isn't a case like that. A few days now may save a few weeks, later on."

"I know that," Day assented, for Jack's laugh had broken in upon the edge of her antagonism. "Still, I confess I like his grit in putting it through alone."

For a long moment, Jack stood staring down at the dainty, girlish figure in the chair before him. Living in the house with Day, he yet knew her far less than Rob, less, even, than he knew Sidney Stayre. As a rule, with Day Argyle, he met her upon the surface of things, talking and laughing gayly, but reserving for Rob's leisure his own more earnest hours. It had seemed to him incredible that any girl so dainty and so blithe as Day could know the graver side of life, or, knowing, could ever care. As a rule, he had treated Day like a pretty toy, and she had been quick to give him what he sought and nothing more. To-night, for the first time, they were meeting upon solid ground, and as yet the ground between them was not wholly smooth.

Nevertheless, however much he might be inclined to smile at her quick antagonism, Jack Blanchard was swift to approve the girl's haughty defence of her brother, her angry reception of his own criticism. Even in the midst of his talk with her, it came to him again and yet again what a delight it must be for

a fellow to have a sister such as that. Jack's life had been singularly remote from girls, singularly unlearned in girl-y ways. An only child, he had gone to a boys' school, thence to college and thence into the army. In none of these, girl life had had any share. Day and Sidney were in reality the first girls with whom he had come into close contact. From the start, he had felt himself mental and moral chums with Sidney. With Day, it was different. He liked her, liked to watch her and talk to her; but he confessed to himself that never, at any given instant, could he predict what she would do next. Sidney was like another boy, a great, frank boy. Day was girl to the marrow of her spine.

And to-night he had discussed the same subject with both girls. He and Sidney had understood each other from the start; they had viewed the matter with the same keen and practical eyes. Day, on the other hand, seeking his advice, had received it petulantly, protesting and leaving him with a curious sense of being somehow in the wrong. He felt the need to justify himself, yet hesitated, lest she resent his earnest speaking. As yet, Jack Blanchard had no notion of the real character hidden beneath Day's blithe exterior. Later, he was destined to find it out.

His hands behind his back and his head bent, Jack slowly paced the rug, four paces this way, four that. Day eyed him furtively, the while. It was against her girlish creed to enter into a wanton quarrel with

any one, least of all with her brother's chosen friend. To be sure, she felt she had had ample cause. Rob Argyle, at least in her hearing, had rarely been a subject of criticism, and Day felt it was her right to resent that criticism as unreasonable, unjust. Nevertheless, now that her ruffled temper was settling down a bit, Day confessed to herself frankly that never before in all the months she had known him, had Jack Blanchard shown himself unjust. He was unreasonable now, beyond a doubt. Still, he probably thought he had a reason and that, to a man of Jack's calibre, amounted to the same thing as having one, for purposes of argument.

Day hated quarrels; as a rule, too, she had had scanty experience in them. When she and Rob, on rare occasions, struck fire, the spark died out before it had had time to set fire to anything. For no other boy save one had she ever cared enough to quarrel, and he was an Englishman and deliberate. Jack was English and deliberate, too, but with a difference. Day felt sure that, under his level manner, Jack Blanchard's nature was as fiery as a man's could be, and, accordingly, the more her own temper cooled, the more she regretted the passing antagonism which, however justified, could not have failed to scar their friendship. Now, as she watched him pace the rug, her girlish intuitions assured her that Jack was regretting it, too, that he was pondering how best to remove the difference which lay between them. Nevertheless, Day held her peace. It was not for her to help

him along. Whatever Jack had to say, should come from himself, unaided.

Her hands clasped loosely in the lap of her white cloth frock, her head resting against the high back of her chair, Day sat very still, watching the tall figure which crossed and recrossed before the scarlet patch of the open fire. She took note of the tightening fingers, of the steady, even stride, of the head bent forward, but still showing something of its usual proud poise. The brown eyes were bent upon the rug at their feet; but Day could see the profile, the level brows, the straight, thin nose, the clean-cut chin, and she told herself that, whether she agreed with him or not, Jack Blanchard was surely good to look upon. Then his steady stride caught her wandering attention, and it threw her mind backward to the months of hardship and denial in South Africa, to the stormy nights and the nights of hushed alarm when that stride had sounded upon the open, empty veldt where Jack was doing picket duty. Day's eyes softened, and she stirred impulsively.

As if her slight movement had aroused him from his reverie, Jack stayed his step and lifted his head to face her.

"Day," he said slowly; "you think I'm hard on Rob."

His voice had lost its dominant, clear note, and sounded lower and appealing. Something in its cadence quickened Day's pulse, and she nodded at him without daring trust herself to speak.

"I'm sorry," he answered. "I didn't mean to be. You know my love for Rob, and all I owe him. But — can't you see? It's this way, Day. He's got a body of his own, a splendid body. It was given to him in first rate order and — isn't there a bit of duty in trying to keep it up to the mark?"

Again Day nodded. Her eyes, though, showed that she was catching the fire of his idea, and Jack rushed on.

"Down there in South Africa — I don't mean to talk about it often — we learned some sharp, hard lessons, no end of them. Among the rest, we learned what our bodies counted for. We big, strong fellows, if we took decent care of ourselves, could accomplish double the work that the little, weak ones could. And we learned that the fellow who took best care of his feet, came in from next day's march in best condition. And we were down there to march. Our bodies generally are given us for something or other definite. Things like that don't happen in this world. And, if they really are given us for some especial use, it's only fair for us to do our best to keep them in first rate working condition. After all, Day, it's work of one sort or another that we're put here to accomplish. And we don't all of us have such perfect bodies as Rob and I. Still —"

"I think I understand," Day said.

But Jack shook off her words, too much in earnest now to heed them.

"No; you don't. Else you'd not stand by Rob in

this thing," he said directly. "When your father gave you the pony, what did you do with him?"

"Rode him," Day made prompt answer. Then she flushed scarlet, as it dawned upon her that she had not made the answer Jack desired.

"Yes," Jack assented shortly. "You also saw to it, though, that he had the best care of any horse in the stable. He was a splendid present, and you took care to keep him so. That's the way with Rob; he ought to look out for himself. A body like his is no mean thing to own; it's up to him to keep it in good order."

"And he does," Day protested.

"Not much. Not when he runs the risk of spoiling it for always, for the sake of a few weeks' fun now. Can't you see it, Day? It's just as 'tis with Phyllis Stayre. That child has no business, no moral right, to turn herself into such a fright."

Day swiftly attacked the side issue.

"Phyllis isn't a beauty," she observed.

"No. Still, that's no reason she should be a scarecrow," Jack replied, with masculine bluntness. "I don't know much about clothes; but I'd be willing to bet I could take Phyllis Stayre and fuzzle her up a bit, and put her into a pretty gown and a wide hat with feathers, and make her pass in a crowd. Now what are you laughing at?"

"At you," Day gasped, as she wiped her eyes, damp with mirth at Jack's unexpected climax. "The idea of Phil in a picture hat is rather startling, Jack."

"I'd like to start it," he answered promptly.

But Day, with a swift change of mood, had cast her merriment from her. Rising, she stood before him, looking up at him with brown eyes as true and steady as his own.

"Jack," she said; "I was cross to you, a little while ago. You needn't shake your head. I saw you knew it in the time of it, and now I'm sorry. And about Rob, I hate to own up; but — I think you're right."

For a moment, he stood smiling down into her uplifted face. Then his strong hand shut on hers.

"And not unjust, Day?" he questioned, with an eagerness which surprised them both.

"No, Jack," she answered gently. "I begin to think you couldn't be."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GREATLY to the sorrow of his friends, Rob Argyle spent the Christmas holidays in his own room where, alternating between the bed and the couch, he railed at the doctor, girded at his woes, and made merry with what grace he could.

"Confound you, you old fraud!" he said to Jack on Christmas eve. "You're more responsible for this mess than you know."

"Sorry!" Jack answered briefly. "Shall I beat my breast, Rob?"

"No; I'd rather take a hand in the beating, myself, unless I leave you to Sidney. You've entirely wrecked her plans, you and his medical majesty."

"How's that?"

"She was going to have us all there, this evening. I sent her word to go ahead and leave me out; but Day balked and refused to go without me, so the whole thing fell through. Mean trick of yours, too."

Jack laughed, and his laugh sounded comfortable and at peace with the world. For the past week, he had fallen into the habit of spending all his evenings in Rob's room, where the two young fellows alternately read the evening papers and gossiped of all things upon earth. As a rule, Day was with them;

but to-night she was mysteriously absent, for Christmas was at hand, and she had much to do.

"You don't look as if you were a candidate for sympathy, Rob," he said unfeelingly.

By way of answer, Rob hurled a cushion at him with an aim as unerring as ever he had given a pig-skin ball.

"Much you know about it!" he retorted.

Jack appropriated the pillow, stuffed it back of his head and turned to stare lazily at the recumbent form on the couch.

"That's where you are right," he assented then. "Granted the mere detail of an invalid leg, we haven't had much in common. Out in Africa, we didn't go in for down pillows and wadded silk dressing-gowns, you old Sybarite. We were thankful for a mattress on a plank and a layer of mosquito netting on top of us."

"I'll change places with you," Rob made generous offer.

"Thanks, no. Your father couldn't spare me from the office. Neither, if I know anything about it, could Day spare you from the house. She treats you like a Chinese idol, in these latter days. She always did, for the matter of that. Do you know, Rob," Jack watched his friend with languid, half-shut eyes; "for the life of me, I can't see why you're not insufferable."

"Probably because I'm suffering." Rob squirmed, as he spoke.

Instantly Jack's eyes flew open.

"Aching, old man?" he queried.

Rob laughed, as he folded his hands at the back of his head.

"You're as bad as all the rest of them, though," he objected. "Still, you put me here, and I owe you one for that."

"You'd have had to lie up sooner or later, even if I had held my peace," Jack assured him.

"Mayhap. Still, you might have given the experiment a try. Besides, you were the first cause of the whole disaster."

"I?" Jack looked as blank as he felt.

"Yes, you. It was the night Phil rowed you. Day and I stayed so long, discussing how to make you even, that I nearly broke my neck, getting down to dinner in time."

But Jack protested.

"Hang it, Rob, can't you drop that off on Phyllis? I didn't make the row."

"No; she made it," Rob explained placidly. "You only made the making. To be sure, if it hadn't been you, it was bound to be some one else. I wonder how the child is getting on."

"I saw her, to-night," Jack answered, as he sank back again into his former luxurious position, with his heels above the level of his chin.

"Where?"

"In the car, coming up town. She looked unusually well, too. She had fuzzed up her hair, and she had some sort of a soft thing at the front of her

neck. Really, she didn't look so bad," Jack made lenient reply.

"High praise for Phil! Did she say anything?"

"Yes." Jack laughed. Then he adopted Phyllis's most nipping tone. "I thank you, Mr. Blanchard; but I am not weary. I prefer to stand."

Rob settled himself down among his cushions and crooked his well knee into a comfortable knot.

"Phil all over," he commented. "I wonder, though, she didn't get in a word about taking the seat of an honest working man."

"Who is that? Phyllis?" Day queried from the threshold.

Jack's feet fell to the floor with a crash. Rising, he drew up a chair for Day; but she shook her head and, crossing the room, perched herself on the couch close to Rob's elbow. With swift precision born of practice, his arm shut around her waist.

"Sidney has just telephoned up here," she said, when she was settled to her liking. "Daddy answered, and she suggested, by way of joke, that you ought to have a telephone here in the room. Daddy is so taken with the notion that he declares he'll have one in, to-morrow. But what about Phyllis?"

"Nothing, except she and Jack have been passing the time of day."

"Really? Was she polite?"

"Faultlessly, as far as words go." Jack laughed at the memory. "Her eyes, though, looked as if she'd like to eat me up."

"Do you know what was going to be the trump card of Sidney's entertainment?" Rob inquired lazily, while he beat a thoughtful tattoo on Day's ribs.

"What?" she questioned, without troubling herself to move from beneath his drumming fingers.

"The watching Phil and Jack enacting Peace on Earth."

Jack roused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen. Jack was gaining the trick of reverie, in these latter days. More than ever since his talk with Day, that night before the parlour fire, he had taken to a habit of dreamily watching the brother and sister, whenever they were together. Moreover, a certain amount of envy was mingled with his dreaming. Now, however, he roused himself at Rob's words.

"I haven't any row with Phil," he objected.

"No; but she has with you, and it comes to the same thing in the end. In her own house and under Sidney's eye, she'd have been bound to call a truce; but, all the same, it would have been fun to watch."

"More likely she wouldn't have appeared at all," Jack answered.

But Day interposed.

"Oh, yes; she would, on Christmas eve and all. Mr. Winthrop would have looked out for that."

Rob glanced up suddenly.

"Wade? What does he have to do with it?"

"More than any of us realize," Day replied shrewdly. "Haven't you noticed what chums they

are lately? And Phyllis isn't nearly so cranky as she was."

Rob shook his head.

"I fail to see it."

"That's because you're a boy," Day made disdainful answer. "If you were a girl, you'd know."

Rob abandoned his drumming, and folded his hands across his breast.

"When Phil Stayre ceases to rage, may I be there to see."

Turning, Day smoothed down his hair with a mocking caress.

"You're nothing but a bedridden old croaker," she assured him then. "When you get on your legs again, you'll find out a thing or two. In some way or other, Mr. Winthrop has discovered that Phyllis wears her right side for a lining, and now he is trying to pull it out to show it off to the rest of us."

Jack, however, capped her sentence, thoughtfully and with his eyes fastened upon his toes.

"Perhaps he is," he observed trenchantly. "Still, you must admit that it sticks inside most outrageously tight."

Nevertheless, Day Argyle had been wiser than the boys were willing to confess. Just whereupon she based her theory that Phyllis was losing somewhat of her thorniness, it would be hard to say. However, the fact remained that, ever since the night of the game, the night when Wade had found her crying in her room, Phyllis Stayre had had occasional gentle

hours. As yet, they were intermittent and wholly impossible to predict. As yet, they were of short duration and followed by gusty tempers which wreaked themselves upon all the household, with but one exception. That exception was Wade, who not only seemed to escape all Phyllis's storms, but even was able to coax her out of the storm back into a semblance of calm. No one, Wade himself least of all, had any notion that the little box on Phyllis's table held under lock and key, among the relics all girls keep as holy, a dozen withered shreds of pink chrysanthemum. No one, least of all Wade, was aware just why it was that Phyllis's erstwhile smooth locks now hung in awkward ringlets about her brow, nor why that brow showed, every now and then, a great white blister left by the irons that baffled her unaccustomed hands, nor why the checkered apron vanished and the girl's stubby nails took on a feeble polish.

Once or twice, and at long intervals, Wade had let fall a word of approval; once he had come to the rescue of his young cousin when the younger children had been uttering derisive comment upon Phyllis's late-born vanity and its slight achievement; but, for the most part, he held his peace. In part, his silence came from ignorance of how the child was hanging to his lightest word; in part, it sprang from his determination that Phyllis should work out her own salvation in her own way and along her own lines. Wade rarely preached. As far as Phyllis was con-

cerned, he had spoken his sermon once and for all. He watched his young cousin keenly, however; and, more often than the others knew, he forestalled her fractiousness by a quiet word which turned the tide of thought into less dangerous channels.

And Phyllis was no dunce. She saw it all, sometimes on the instant, sometimes not until long afterwards; and she gained strength and courage from the surety that Wade, for one, was on her side. Unlike Sidney, Phyllis lacked self-reliance. Her aggressive trick of pushing off her would-be friends had been the merest pose; but, like most poses, it had done its work. Too late to mend the matter, the girl had suddenly wakened to find that she stood alone. And Phyllis hated loneliness above all things else. Too proud to ask for friends, she had stalked off along her way, apart from all the others, had resigned herself to an endless future of stalking on alone. And then, all at once and in spite of her repeated rebuffs, Wade had caught up with her, had thrown out a helping hand and now, steadily and surely, was dragging her back again into the common path.

It had all been done very gently, and so quietly that no one else seemed to heed it. Now and then Wade overtook her, as she was starting out alone, walked on beside her for a block or two, and left her smiling at his merry talk. Now and then of an evening, he hunted her up in her own room whither she had retreated to nurse her injured dignity; now and then at the table he turned to ask for her opinion, or

quoted her to the others. That was really all; but, in the eyes of Phyllis, it was much. At least, it proved that her personality counted for something in Wade's eyes. Phyllis Stayre was curiously lacking in jealousy. Because she wished to count for something, she had no desire to stand first. Now that Wade was ready to give her an occasional half-hour, she felt not the slightest wish to come between himself and Sidney. Rather, instead of that, she made a futile effort to model herself on Sidney's lines, regardless of the fact that Sidney's lines refused to fit themselves to the angles of her own personality. Her logic was simple. Again and again Wade had spoken of his whole-souled admiration for Sidney; and Wade's opinion, just then, was Phyllis Stayre's rule of life. To be sure, her life wobbled occasionally and fell far, far away from the rule; but she bravely did her best to hold it steady, and, when it wobbled, she brought it back with a jerk. Wade, upon that far-off night, had expressed a wish to be proud of his young cousin; and Phyllis, since that time, had done her level best to earn that pride.

Seated before the library fire, on Christmas eve, the girl was pondering the matter. Sidney was putting Bungay into bed; the other children were upstairs, and the room was very still. Nevertheless, so deeply was she lost in her own meditations that she did not hear her cousin's step, until he paused beside her.

"Counting your mercies and forgiving your enemies, Phil?" he asked her gayly.

"Perhaps," she admitted rather reluctantly for, whatever her growth in grace, Phyllis was never prone to air it before the eyes of others.

Wade drew up a chair and settled himself beside her.

"How are you getting along?"

She laughed shortly.

"Too fast. I don't appear to have any especial mercies."

"Only me," Wade interpolated flippantly, as he bent forward to pick up a magazine from the table at his elbow.

Her eyes flashed into sudden fire, as she turned to look at him.

"You never spoke a truer word in all your life, Wade Winthrop!" she said earnestly.

The magazine slid from his knee to the floor, and he faced her in some surprise.

"Why, Phyllis!"

"Yes," she made tempestuous answer; "I couldn't live a minute, not a single minute longer, without you, Wade."

"I'm glad, Phil. I didn't suppose I was of any use."

"Use! You understand things, and never make blunders." Then she repressed herself, as if ashamed of her unwonted outburst. "Well, there's one huge mercy, as you see," she added, in a tone she strove in vain to render nonchalant. "It doesn't take long to count it, though."

"And the enemies?" he reminded her, hoping to rouse her by his teasing until she forgot the momen-

tary sadness which seemed to follow on her swift emotion.

Once more he was surprised. This time, it was to see the sadness deepen.

"Wade," she said, and, as she spoke, she clasped her hands with a gesture of despair; "I can't begin to count them."

For a moment, he sat looking at her keenly. Then he said, —

"Never mind the counting, Phil, so long as you forgive them."

"That's the worst of it," she answered, and her voice broke on the words. "I've fought with almost every one I know. They all hate me; but I don't seem to care much about them, one way or the other. I don't want bad things to happen to them; I only want them to keep out of my way, ever so far out of my way. Even Jack —"

"What about Jack?" he prompted her, after the pause had lengthened.

It lengthened again, while she sat staring at the fire. At last she turned her eyes back to Wade.

"Jack is the worst of all," she said frankly. "I've squabbled with Rob and Day; but they don't care, and they don't count. Jack did care, and so he counts a lot. I wish I liked him better."

"Why don't you?" Wade asked unexpectedly.

The answer came with a directness which wellnigh took his breath away.

"Two reasons: you all make such a fuss over him

that I'm sick of the very sound of his name. And, besides that, I've fought with him till he hates me, and I don't like people who hate me."

"I strongly suspect," Wade seemed to be merely thinking aloud; "I strongly suspect that, if he liked you after the way you've treated him, you would call him a milksop, and dislike him accordingly."

Phyllis flounced forward in her chair, and sat with both elbows on her knees.

"Yes. I should," she admitted.

"Then he's bound to catch it, one way or the other. What are you going to do about it?"

"That's what I want to know," Phyllis said shortly. "I've been fussing about it, all the evening. I hate fights, nowadays. I didn't use to care, and I don't see why I do now. Is it because I'm getting old, Wade?" She turned her spectacles upon him gloomily.

Wade struggled bravely with his mirth.

"It's more likely because you're getting good," he suggested.

Phyllis frowned.

"But I don't want to get good," she said; "at least, not goody good."

Privately Wade was of the impression that, as yet, the danger of such consummation was but slight. With rare discretion, he changed the subject back to its starting-point.

"But there's no especial sense in your disliking Jack, Phyllis. He is a good fellow in every way."

"That may all be," she retorted, with a swift flash of her old defiance. "Still, if you were in my place, and had let out to him the very peskiest side of your whole self, you'd dislike him as much as I do."

Whatever might be his own attitude to Jack, poor Wade was ready to admit himself dazed by her sudden changes of front. Nevertheless, he persevered in driving home his point.

"Then what made you show him what you call your peskiest side?" he asked gravely.

"Because he deserved it, and because that's all there is of me. I'm nothing in the world but a bundle of peskiness," Phyllis announced, in a wave of complete contrition.

"If you were, you could get over it," Wade reassured her calmly. "As it is, you're no such thing. I must confess, though, Phil, that you've done your best to give Jack that impression. Now, for a change, why don't you try to show him a bit of the other side?"

"I haven't any other side," Phyllis persisted glumly.

Wade laughed.

"Allow me to be the judge," he advised her. "Just lately, we've been getting rather good friends, you and I; and I know you can be a friend worth having. Why not show Jack that you can?"

In spite of herself, her face had lighted at his words. Nevertheless, —

"But I don't like Jack," she objected.

"What of that?"

"I don't care to be friends with him. I only don't want to fight."

"Phyllis," Wade spoke with sudden gravity; "you're trying to stand on ground as narrow as the edge of a knife-blade; in the long run, it's bound to cut your feet."

She watched him keenly and dry-eyed; but she bit her lip. This time, the silence lasted long.

"Oh, dear! I wish I knew what to do," she lamented mournfully at length.

Wade had not been slow to follow her thoughts. Nevertheless, he was determined that Phyllis's impulses for good should come from herself alone.

"About?" he queried.

"About Jack."

"What do you want to do?"

"I don't know. I suppose —" Phyllis pondered for a moment, then resumed; "I suppose I could do something to show him I was sorry."

"Why don't you?" Wade asked quietly.

"I believe I will. It would sort of even things up, and, at least, we could start out fresh. Only —" she looked up with sudden suspicion; "only I don't want him to think I'm toadying around, trying to make him like me. If I do anything at all to make up, he must understand it's just to make up for what I've done, not to trap him into anything more."

Wade smiled a little; but Phyllis's eyes were once more on the fire, and she did not notice Wade.

"Jack's not stupid," he said then. "I think he will understand."

Phyllis nodded into the glowing coals.

"He's got to," she said. "I'll make sure of that." Then, turning, she snatched her cousin's hand, with one of her rare bursts of affection. "Oh, Wade, what should I do without you!" she exclaimed. "You always understand."

But Wade, after she had left him alone by the fire, sighed a little to himself. Coming to him all unsought, it was no slight responsibility for a man still under thirty, this playing Mentor to a growing girl.

And, meanwhile, up in her own room, Phyllis had pulled open her top bureau drawer and stood looking into it with dubious, regretful eyes. There, among the gifts she had gathered up to put on the next night's tree, lay neatly folded her one token of real love. For a month now, Phyllis had toiled unceasingly, straining her nerves and her near-sighted eyes upon her offering to Wade. Finished at last and smudgily laundered by her own loving hands, they lay there ready, three handkerchiefs whose hem-stitched borders, irregular, puckered here and there and grimed with toil, bore witness to her patient devotion. She had wanted to do six of them; but the days had slipped by faster than her needle could count the threads and prick in the uneven stitches. There were but three, and they all had been for Wade. But now?

Slowly one great, round tear rolled down her nose and fell on the topmost fold of linen. It was all her

work, and done, every single stitch, to show her love for Wade. But, after all, Wade knew her love; he needed no handkerchiefs to prove so evident a fact. Irresolutely she lifted one of the squares of linen, irresolutely she dropped it and fell to fumbling among the other parcels in her drawer, toys for the children, a ribbon for Sidney, and her father's book. Then she shook her head. With Phyllis Stayre, it was all or nothing. Her fingers shut again upon the handkerchief and, not trusting herself to hesitate longer, she pushed the drawer together and swiftly crossed to the table where her pen and ink lay ready to her hand.

Here she hesitated longer, dipping her pen, sucking it dry, biting the holder, then dipping it again. At length she gave a nod, short, sharp, decisive, and, snatching up a sheet of paper, she dipped her pen once more.

"*Dear Mr. Blanchard,*" she wrote; "*I wish you a Merry Christmas, and I'm sorry I was so horrid to you. Your —*" Again she hesitated; then, "*acquaintance, Phyllis Stayre,*" she added.

Twice and thoughtfully she read it over and, as she read, her frown deepened and she chewed her penholder savagely. At last, she took the penholder from her lips, knitted her brows and wrote again, —

"*P. S. This is just to even up. Honestly, that's all. P.*"

That done, she went to bed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ROB'S temporary retirement from active life brought in its train two marked results. It taught Sidney Stayre how much she had come to depend upon the company of the Argyles, and it brought Jack Blanchard and Day into a relation that was wholly new. Up to that time, Jack had been distinctively Rob's friend. Day had liked him, for Rob's sake as much as for Jack's own. Nevertheless, underneath all her friendly cordiality had lain the fact that she regarded him as an alien, and one so much older than herself that they could have but little in common.

Their long talk together, on the eve of Rob's taking to his bed, had been the first step towards their closer friendship. Both were generous in their judgment of others; both, when at last they had parted for the night, had been ready to admit that their previous judgments must be modified. To Jack's mind, Day had showed herself something a good deal more than the pretty doll he had always considered her to be. Her swift rallying to Rob's support, following closely upon her evident anxiety, showed that her love for her brother was something deeper than the matter-of-course affection too often bestowed on relatives.

Her final yielding to his own point of view betokened, according to Jack's theory, that Day's conscience would be strong enough, when roused, to guide her love.

And Day, in spite of all that it entailed, had liked Jack's viewpoint immensely. To be sure, it had been horrible, this thrusting her brother into a corner out of all the holiday fun. Alone in her room, that night, Day had made secret lamentation. Nevertheless, she could not but admire Jack's sturdy sense of right and wrong.

"It was the fellow who took best care of his feet who came in the fittest from the next day's march," he had told her, with a smile.

"Yes," she had assented. "I can see it would be better."

But he had turned upon her with swift impatience.

"It's not the being better; it's just a plain case of duty," he had said. "We're put into our road and given our feet. It's our place, then, to keep ourselves fit to march, not hobble."

And Day, staring up into his level eyes, had suddenly realized that Jack Blanchard's life matched his belief, realized, too, that Jack Blanchard was capable of doing the one thing harder than fitting his life to his belief, the fitting to his belief another life than his. Up to that hour, Day had never heard him preach. It was plain that he did it with difficulty now. Day was broad enough to admit that it was conscience alone which made him overcome that difficulty. For

the hour, she admired Jack unreservedly. Nevertheless, it was dreary enough to miss Rob from the familiar rooms.

In the days that followed, her admiration for Jack warmed and quickened. Of necessity, they were thrown more together, at their meals and in the intervals of their visits in Rob's room. Heretofore, they had talked to each other mostly by way of Rob whose very exuberance generally made him the leader of the conversation. Now, lacking his lead, lacking, too, his exuberant mirth, they talked more earnestly, each showing to the other glimpses of the deeper nature which, up to now, had been hidden beneath the froth of fun. At first they talked mainly of Rob, of the probable length of his exile, of the gap he was making in all their pleasures. Then, by degrees, the talk wandered off, until Jack found himself telling Day of his past life, of his changed plans and of the mother whom he mentioned only with lowered voice and reverent eyes. And Day listened and made grave comment. Then, in return, she told him of her school, her friends, asked his advice about her hobbies, and even told him of the dreams which hung about her future when Rob and she, their education done, should wander around the world together, meeting all men, but finding their best content each in the company of the other.

And then at such times, while he listened, a little cloud came into Jack's keen eyes. It was all like a lovely story in which he could have no share. Be-

lieving it all implicitly, it only increased his sense of belonging to no one save his mother, and she was old and far away.

However, this was at first. As the days stole by, Jack became conscious of a new sweetness that marked Day's manner to him. No more cordial and friendly than before, she was yet gentler, more heedful of his mood, more careful for his content. It was as if, little by little, she were allowing him to tread upon the edge of the place where Rob had stood alone, allowing him there and even welcoming him. There was no trace of sentiment in her manner, no touch of girlish coquetry. She merely made him feel that, in some mysterious fashion for which they neither one could account, he had grown to be a part of her life, and she was glad to have it so.

Only once, however, had she put this new mood into words. Early on Christmas morning, he had gone into Rob's room, and he had found Day already there, curled up in her accustomed place within the curve of her brother's elbow. At Jack's coming, she had sprung up with a little glad exclamation, and crossed the floor, both hands held out in greeting.

"Oh, Jack! Merry Christmas, and such thanks!" And then, cutting short his gay reply, she had added, "And it is so good to have you here with us. I'm richer than I was, you know, for now I feel as if Santa Claus had given me an extra brother." And, her arm in his, she came back to Rob's side.

Sidney, in the meantime, a good deal to her own

disgust, was missing the Argyles acutely. Rob, shut up in his room, was debarred from receiving calls. Day, wholly absorbed in him and in their united interests which never became half so insistent as when Rob's other activities were curtailed, was wellnigh invisible. Upon the rare occasions when she did emerge, it was to go for a long walk or drive with Jack Blanchard whom Rob had deputed to act as escort in his place. Jack's office hours, in those winter days, were framed upon a most elastic schedule. Mr. Argyle himself was out of town, gone west upon a business trip which yet demanded nothing of his secretary. In his absence, Jack's duties were cut down to the lowest terms, and Mr. Argyle's parting charge had laid upon him the care of Day.

"The child sticks to Rob like a burr, when he's ill," he had told his secretary, the night before starting for the West. "I count on you to see to it that she goes out, every single day. If she rebels, tell her it's my order. You know how to handle a horse and to ride. Keep her out of doors all you can. It won't hurt either of you, you know."

And Rob had come to his father's support in such energetic fashion that Day bowed to the inevitable and to their combined wills, and, in sunshine and in storm, went faring forth with Jack Blanchard at her side. Together they explored the city, wandering at will among the down-town streets, or driving far to the northward, until Jack learned to know the place as well as Day herself. Now and then they crossed

to Brooklyn, or else, standing in the bow of the Annex boat with the bitter wind whistling in their ears, they rounded the point of the island, while Jack told over again for the twentieth time of the one night of ice and storm when, with Rob beside him, he had crossed the Levis ferry. They came in from these expeditions, their lungs and their minds filled with ozone, bringing back to Rob more than a passing whiff of the bracing outside air.

And Sidney, meanwhile, called in their absence, called and called again. Then wisely she resolved to save her temper and her carfares. Just now, there seemed for her no place within the Argyle plans. With characteristic philosophy, she accepted the situation and admitted its justice. Under the same conditions and with a brother such as Rob, she would have been as much absorbed as Day was now. Accordingly, she shut her teeth and, for the time being, turned her back upon the Madison Avenue house. With the busy holiday season at hand, she could find occupation and interest enough inside her own four walls, or among the comrades of her school life. The Argyles, after all, were the newest of her friends, and hence the least necessary of all. Six months before, she had been quite content without them. Late one night, she reasoned it all out to her own satisfaction. She fell asleep at last, hugging her resolve to enjoy herself entirely among her own old friends. Twenty-four hours later, she was ready to throw her resolve as far from her as possible. Not all the lusty, inde-

pendent resolution in the world could make her own old friends fill the place so lately held by Rob and Day. Sidney admitted the fact to herself with a certain horror. Was it in reality Rob and Day she longed for so acutely; or was it the whole luxurious setting of the Argyle home? Like a stern young Puritan, she spent a good half of the second night in arguing it all out again, and she came to the humiliating conclusion that it was not the Argyles, but the Argyle fleshpots, for which she was probably mourning.

The next day proved her mistake. Amy Browne, likewise forlorn by reason of being bereft of Day, swept down on Sidney and took her first to drive and then home to luncheon. The Brownes possessed an English butler and a sixteenth-century dining table. There were three old masters on the parlour walls, and a white-capped French cook in the kitchen. Amy had been all cordial smiles. Nevertheless, Sidney had gone home, more homesick for the Argyles than ever. To cap the climax of her woes, she went home to find that Wade, in celebration of one of his rare half-holidays, had taken Phyllis to the Hippodrome. Alone in her room, she sat down to consider the situation; but Bungay, a loyal little tail to a despondent kite, followed her up the stairs and insisted that he be considered first.

"After all, Bungay boy," Sidney observed, as she hoisted the heavy child to her knee; "there's no especial sense in getting in the dumps. Just now my

places are all full, and I don't seem to be of much use. Still, I suppose I'll get my chance, some time or other. Meanwhile, let's go and take a walk."

And Bungay, nothing loath, assented and dashed away in search of his coat and cap, while Sidney shook herself to drive away the blues. She was unmistakably lonesome, now that Rob was ill and Day and Wade both occupied with some one else. Nevertheless, in Day's place, she would have stuck close to Rob's elbow; and, watching Phyllis, she could not find it in her heart to grudge Wade's occasional desertion of herself in favour of her younger sister. As far as Wade was concerned, Sidney felt sure there was no room for doubt. Standing first herself, she was willing that Phyllis should hold the second place, if only for the sake of all the new-found happiness was doing for the child. Wade had kept his own counsel, to be sure; but Sidney's eyes were keen.

Up in the Park, she hunted out a secluded corner where, careless who saw her, she could run races with Bungay, or pelt him with snowballs, as best suited his changing whim. The crispy winter air, the exercise and Bungay's gleeful chatter were fast restoring the girl to her wonted mood of optimism, while the cold wind had set her cheeks to tingling and lighted her brown eyes to dancing stars. So absorbed was she in the antics of her small brother that she took no notice of the carriage drawn up at the entrance of the path, nor did she hear her name spoken once and yet again.

"No matter, she will see us in a minute," Day said then, as she leaned back among the robes.

And Jack nodded assent. For the minute, it was good to sit there in the sun and watch the girlish figure in the dark brown gown and furs, to see the swift, free gestures, the lithe step, the laughing face.

Suddenly Bungay turned.

"There's Sambo's master!" he proclaimed, with a whoop of rapture, and went scudding down the path to the carriage.

"You've a memory and a half, young man," Jack said, as he helped the child to clamber to the front seat.

"That's three halves, or more than one, and aren't you going to take us to ride?" Bungay made prompt response.

Sidney, following him in more leisurely fashion, came up in time to hear his final words.

"Bungay!" she said warningly.

Bungay squirmed down from the seat and stood at attention.

"That's what horses is for," he explained. "When I'm a man, I'll have ninety-'leven horses, and take everybody I know to ride."

Day laughed.

"All right. We'll all go. But I was looking for you. They told me at the house that we'd find you here. We want you to come with us. This is the first time Jack has driven two horses, and I need you to support my courage."

Sidney hesitated.

"I'd love to go; but — what about Bungay?"

But Bungay had already wriggled back on the seat and, his elbow in Jack's ribs, was prying himself to position.

"Come on," he said cheerfully. "We'll all go, and I can drive and then, if we get smashed up, we'll come home in the p'leece wagon with the red cross on the end."

"A nice prediction!" Jack commented dryly. "I think I'll keep the reins in my own hands. But what were you doing in the Park, Bungay?"

And Bungay made unhesitating answer, —

"Getting Sidney out of the dumps, and playing squat tag in the snow."

Over Bungay's rapturous head, Jack cast at Sidney a glance of merry question.

"I didn't know you ever did such things, Miss Sidney."

Sidney blushed, while she registered a mental vow to take it out on Bungay at the earliest possible moment. Nevertheless, she made demure answer, —

"Certainly. I know seven sorts of tag, and I play them all with Bungay, whenever I get the chance."

"At once? But I meant the dumps."

"Oh." Sidney's tone was nonchalant. "It's a patent of respectability to have them. It proves you have a soul."

"Or a digestion," Day suggested prosaically. "It's generally that, I think. What had you eaten, Sidney?"

Sidney's eyes twinkled. Then she burst into an irrepressible laugh.

"Luncheon at Amy's house, if you must know. I suspect it disagreed with me in more ways than one."

Again over Bungay's unconscious head, Jack sent her a quick glance of understanding, while Day was making thoughtful answer, —

"I really can't see why you don't like Amy better."

"Chiefly because she isn't you."

Day frowned.

"I'm not fishing. That's not what I mean."

"But it's what I do mean, Day," Sidney replied, while, under cover of the fur rug, she nestled a bit closer to her friend. "I feel at home with you; I don't with her."

"And yet Amy is nice to you," Day pursued thoughtfully.

"That's just the trouble; she is too nice."

"She isn't to everybody, though." Day's tone was defensive.

"That's just another trouble. There's no reason she should treat me better than anybody else."

In the innermost recesses of his brain, Jack Blanchard disagreed with her. Nevertheless, he judged it well to break in upon Day's answer.

"Rob is down-stairs again, to-day," he said, interrupting Bungay's disquisition upon the number of snakes that could be made from the tails before him.

"Really?" Sidney sat up alertly. "He's better,

then? It seems such ages since he was in his room. How soon will he be out?"

"Another week. The doctor says he will be all the better for the rest, though."

"After all," Day's voice was suddenly dreary; "it does seem as if he never would be really well. He gains so fast for ever so long, and then, all at once, something goes wrong and puts him back to the very beginning once more. I'd give anything in this whole world to see him strong again."

Jack's eyes were fixed on the distant curve where the drive lost itself from sight beneath the trees, and he spoke thoughtfully.

"It's no use, Day. All the giving in the world won't do it. We can only sit around and watch the poor chap wait for his own good times to come again. Nobody can make the next man's bed."

But Sidney interposed.

"No; but he can smooth out some of the wrinkles for him."

Jack shook his head.

"I've never had much experience in lying up, only that one time in South Africa. Still, I've a notion that, if you put your mind to it, you can take some comfort out of a wrinkle. It keeps you from fussing about other things that are really worse."

But already Day had regained her usual blithe poise.

"Jack," she reminded him audaciously; "you ate luncheon at home, not with Amy. Please behave yourself accordingly."

"We had preserves for luncheon, and I didn't get but only one help," Bungay observed. "I'm awful hungry, and I guess we'd better be going home before long."

"I'll tell you," Day suggested suddenly. "Let's give Rob a surprise party. We'll leave Bungay at the door, and then take Sidney home with us."

"But Rob loves to see me, when I come," Bungay made sentimental soliloquy. "I think I'd better stay with Sidney. My mother always did tell me to stay with Sidney, ever since the day I went to Brooklyn."

Jack laughed.

"I owe you one for that, young man."

Pulling off his scarlet mitten, Bungay spread out one moist pink palm.

"All right," he said hopefully. "Please pay it in silver, though, and then I'll change it up small, the way I do my Sunday-school money."

"Bungay!" This time, Sidney spoke with obvious consternation.

"Well, why not? They ask us for our pennies, and my father always gives me a five cents," Bungay explained, with a fervour which brought him to his knees on the seat. "What's the use of giving them things they don't want?"

"Exactly." With a deft gesture, Jack caught the child as he was about to tumble headlong to the ground. "That's the way we feel about Rob. We asked for Sidney, and we don't see any use in giving

him you. Therefore we leave you at the door of your house, and in you go."

And Bungay, starting to roar forth his opposition, looked up into the level eyes above him and met something there which bade him hold his peace. Jack Blanchard had learned, years ago, the soldier's lesson, to obey. The time would come, however, that he would pass that lesson on to others and they would heed his teaching.

It was late, that evening, when Sidney rose reluctantly from before the fire in the Argyle library. Even then, late as it was, Rob felt called on to remonstrate; but Sidney shook her head.

"Because it's seventeen days since I've seen you, there's no reason I should stay seventeen times the outside limit of decorum," she protested, laughing.

"Seventeen! It seems like seventy, and there aren't any limits to decorum, anyhow. Sit down again, like a good soul."

"Can't. My family will be wailing for my return. Oh, but it's been good to see you, Rob, even if you don't get up to escort me to the door! When are you coming to return this visit?"

"When I get so far recovered that I don't walk like a trundle bed," Rob answered calmly. "Meanwhile, you'll come again?"

"Of course, if you want me to."

"We try to accept whatever comes, you know, even our guests. And I say, Sidney," Rob called after her, as she went out the door; "next time, you'd best

bring Phil. I'm getting cloyed with sweets, these days, and I think a row with her would clear the atmosphere."

Sidney reappeared upon the threshold.

"Unless the lightning struck too hard," she amended promptly.

"Like Jack? You heard about his Christmas offering?"

"No. Phyllis didn't show me any."

Rob laughed. Stretched out at his ease on the leather couch, he looked supremely lazy, supremely happy, supremely full of mirth. Sidney, standing by his side and smiling down into his jolly blue eyes, found it hard to realize that this was the invalid whose absence, only a few short hours ago, she had been mourning with such despondency.

"What about Jack?" she demanded, as Rob still held his peace. "Did he send Phyllis a Christmas present, and she not say a word about it?"

"Not much. It was the other way about."

"What!" Sidney's face betrayed her astonishment. "Phyllis sent Jack something?"

"Exactly so. She sent him a bee-youtiful handkerchief. Day says she must have made it, herself."

Sidney nodded in confirmation of Day's theory.

"She did make some for Wade."

"Poor Wade! Right there in the house, he's cornered into using them," Rob made pitiful comment.

"Phil isn't exactly tidy with her needle."

"Yes; but, after all, she is a little thing to do such

work," Sidney answered, with a swift generosity which Rob noted and liked, as something unfamiliar in her attitude to Phyllis.

"Jack was pleased," he said; "no end pleased. There was a note with it, something about being sorry and all that."

"Why, the dear child!" This time, Sidney spoke impetuously, heedless of Rob's laugh.

"Wait a jiffy, till you hear the rest, though. Jack was charmed and, next day when he met Phil in the street, he stopped and told her so."

"Well?" Sidney urged him, as he paused to chuckle.

"It wasn't well; 'twas ill. Likewise, it made him ill. He smiled at her, and she smiled at him, a regular Phyllis smile, and said, 'You needn't think I did it because I like you any better than I ever did, for I don't. I was only ashamed about myself; that's all.' We've been teasing Jack about it, ever since."

"What does he say?" Sidney asked, in mingled shame and mirth.

"Says it is no wonder you aren't more conceited, with Phyllis living in the house. Give the dear child my love, and tell her to come to see me soon. I've been spoiling to tell you this tale; I knew you would appreciate it, and Day promised to leave it for me."

"Rob," Sidney's tone was almost tragic; "what would you do with such a sister?"

"Build her a halo and some wings, and stump her to grow up to them," Rob made placid reply. "That

is the only way to get around Phil, to make her take a dare."

Out in the hall, Sidney found Jack waiting to take her home. As they went down the steps together, she turned to him impulsively.

"Rob has been telling me about your Christmas gift," she said. "What can you think of my small sister?"

He laughed; but, by the flaring corner light, she could see that his eyes were grave.

"We'll be friends yet," he predicted. "Only give me time."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FASTER, far faster than Day Argyle could wish or realize, the winter weeks rushed past her, and March came upon the city, windy and bright and bracing. February had been a month of cloud and snow; but now the white asphalt streets gleamed cleanly up at the deep blue sky, and the many windows of the lofty down-town buildings sent the sunlight flashing back in long, bright rays which started from their polished surfaces to cross and cross again in checkered bands of flame athwart the crispy air. Down the harbour, the waves sparkled in golden crests which rose above the dark blue water, or shone in patches and long lines of cream white foam behind the dancing ferries. The very air itself was glittering, and the great city glittered with it.

To Day's young mind, the winter hours were glittering like the city. Gladly she would have caught each one and held it back a little, before it passed her. Rob's temporary invalidism had been the one dark spot upon her content, and that long since had become a distant memory, leaving him none the worse for the experience. For the rest, Day could find no fault with what the year was giving her. Now and then, she even paused while she tried to count

her mercies; but she usually stopped short, balked by a wholly inadequate number of fingers on which to keep the score. Rob always headed the list, and, as the weeks rushed by, Jack slowly crept from the little finger towards the thumb. Jack was a comfort, Day admitted to herself. As free from moods as Rob, he was graver by weight of years and of his busy life; and, by reason of his very gravity, she found herself more and more inclining to turn to him in her own graver moods. Rob would be always Rob, and first. But, when his other friends claimed him for occasional days, it was good to find Jack waiting, steady and strong, to take his place.

Day's winter, however, like that of Rob and of Sidney Stayre, was holding its own due share of hard work. As a rule, it is impossible to drift lazily into college; there are equations to be solved, and conjugations to be learned and themes to be written and, alas, rewritten. No amount of young enthusiasm can turn this into anything but drudgery; but Day drudged with a will, determined that she would yield first honours neither to Rob because he was a boy, nor to Sidney by reason of her extra year of age. Far back in Day's remote past, the fiat had gone forth that she must go through college. Later, she could amuse herself as she chose; but Mr. Argyle refused all notion of having a daughter who was plaything for the parlour rather than a comrade for the library. Day had accepted the fiat when she was too young to recognize what it entailed, and, as years

brought recognition to her, she had felt no desire to withdraw from its hold. Her one regret had lain in the fact that Rob would be ready, two years before her own preparation was ended. Now that his accident had delayed his work, she was looking forward to a wholly joyous four years of their sharing the same interests, of their taking the same courses, and of his spending an infinite number of Sundays as her guest.

And yet, Cambridge was many miles from Northampton; the Sundays would be separated by many and many a week day. After all, the present year was best of all, and Day clung to it greedily. As a rule, the present and the future occupied her whole attention. Now and then, though, usually upon some evening when Rob's outside friends were absorbing him, Day's mind rushed backward into the past, with a passionate regret for those wasted middle years when she had gone her way and left Rob to go on his. For not always had the brother and sister sufficed each for the other's needs. In their growing youth, there had been a time when chance and circumstance had forced them out of their childish intimacy and into something very like indifference. Even now Day shuddered at the thought of what her life would have lacked, had not chance intervened for the second time and brought them once more together. If Rob had remained in Exeter, if Day had yielded to the increasing claims of her own young gayeties, the mischief might have been done past all

mending. Instead of that, their months together in the quiet little Canadian city had knit once more the half-severed connection, until it was as strong as ever and more precious because it had been so nearly torn away. But Day, when Rob was out of sight and hearing and she could forget his stiffened leg, was entirely thankful for the scrimmage which had ended his school life. He had suffered from it long and bitterly. However, she was loyal enough to their mutual love to know that, questioned, Rob would have been the first to admit that the hurt had been well worth the while, for the sake of all it had brought him in its train.

Meanwhile, Day's winter had been by no means summed up in lessons and in Rob. Society in its fullest sense may be denied to a girl of sixteen, yet she contrives to get a fair substitute. Day went weekly to her dancing class; she messed with diligence at a cooking school which specialized in teaching girls to keep house out of a chafing dish and a pint tin cup. She lunched industriously from house to house among her friends, until she revolted from the routine of following up a moving boarding house where the same people ate the same chops and peas, three days out of every seven. There were little evening parties, too, to which she went, sometimes alone, sometimes with Rob as escort, though he rebelled occasionally at the monotony of sitting in a corner and watching the others dance. Once and once only, Jack Blanchard was invited to go with them, for Amy's con-

science was still a little sore whenever she remembered that far-off night at Heatherleigh, and she took advantage of one large party to include Jack among her other guests. Jack went, and danced, and looked his very best. Nevertheless, he was conscious of being a complete misfit. His soldierly carriage and his greater number of years made him stand out, marked, in the crowd of gay youngsters who, for the most part, had grown up together from their babyhood. Three times he danced with Day, once for himself and twice for Rob, he assured her. In the middle of the third dance, he confided to her his fixed determination to accept no more invitations of the sort.

"Amy's all right; she was good to ask me," he answered Day's remonstrant look. "Still, I'm best off out of it; I simply don't belong."

His accent was final, and his eyes betrayed no regret. Nevertheless, as he waltzed Day up to Rob's side, his face had lighted at her words, —

"Don't be in a hurry, Jack. As you always say of Phil, just give me time."

Now and then Day found Sidney at these parties, and Sidney always appeared to be in the very thick of the good time. To be sure, her frocks were simpler than the rest, and she possessed but two of them to her name. However, the fact that anybody with a mathematical turn of mind could predict to a nicety, in advance of any given party, whether Sidney would appear in white or yellow clothes, took nothing from

the welcome she received. Sidney's much pressed yellow gown made quite as many turns of the floor, each evening, as did the brand new frills of Amy or of Day. She was by no means always present. There were still many young hostesses who failed to see the use in broadening their small circle to include this girl from out another world. There were a few, even, who resented Sidney's coming, resented, too, her increasing popularity. And there were others yet, and they were growing in number from week to week, who welcomed her cordially among them.

Day had been first, of course, in bringing this to pass. Rob's frankly-spoken liking for Sidney, too, had carried weight with girls to whom Rob Argyle's word was law. There were many youthful hostesses who included Sidney in their lists because they had discovered that Rob was much more likely to appear, if he knew that Sidney would be on hand to sit out occasional dances with him. From the start, Amy Browne had ranged herself on Sidney's side. At first, this had been less for Sidney's own sake than because Amy adored Day and was eager to make amends for the night when she had brought down Day's wrath upon herself. If Day wished Sidney to be invited, Amy was ready to do her duty. She did it like a heroine, too, with the unexpected reward of finding it turn to pleasure in the doing.

Most girls would have been in danger of having their heads turned by this sudden adoption into a life to which heretofore they had been strangers. Thanks

to her whole life's training, Sidney escaped this danger. For seventeen years, she had been told that people counted merely for what they were, not for what they had; not for what they possessed, but for what they did with their possessions, and she had been bidden to choose her friends accordingly. All her life long, she had been used to seeing all classes and conditions of men welcomed inside their shabby, book-crammed home; never in all that life could she recall having seen her parents seek to gloss over the shabbiness at any point. Good manners ruled the world, her father told her, seated on his knee, and a good heart made good manners, the world over. Would she remember that, and not worry because her new frock was cut out of her mother's old one? And he had dismissed her with a kiss, little dreaming how the short lesson had burned itself into her young memory.

Apart from her training, Sidney owed something to her own downright character, much to her cousin whose own life had been spent in homes such as those which she was beginning to frequent, and most of all to the corrective value of a large family of wayward children. It was totally impossible for Sidney to put on airs away from home when, at any hour, her hostess was liable to walk in upon Pugs and the twins squabbling in the parlour, or upon Bungay making a speedway of the front banisters, or upon Phyllis, armed with soap and sand, polishing the well-worn brass knob on the outside of the front door. It was quite within the limits of chance that Amy Browne

might meet a twin walking forth in a gown cut over from the one Sidney had worn to luncheon at the Brownes', the week before; and Sidney, knowing this, could see no reason to deny that the cutting over had been done by her own hands. Snobbishness, to Sidney's uncompromising mind, consisted not so much in choosing one's own friends from the best of life, as in pretending to be other than one was. Granted a family skeleton, Sidney Stayre would have dandled it forth upon her knee, instead of putting it in a closet and then setting a chair in front of the closet door. She made no secret of liking the best of things; neither did she make any secret of having a large share of her likings denied to her by sheer necessity. She saw no reason, however, for pulling a long face because they were denied.

In spite of some denials, though, Sidney, like Day, was ready to admit that the winter had brought her more than a fair share of fun. It is something to be seventeen, healthy in body and in sense of humour. It is more even than that to be honest, self-reliant and as heedless of self as a healthy puppy. The greater part of Sidney's popularity arose from her own serene indifference as to whether she was popular or not. She was far too busy enjoying her companion of the moment to stop to think whether the companion enjoyed her in the least. And, accordingly, her companion did enjoy her exceedingly.

"I don't see how you do it, though," Jack said to Sidney, one day in middle March.

Side by side, the two friends were loitering along the western edge of Central Park. It was still so early in the afternoon that the sun lay warm upon the asphalt, and Sidney had given frank expression to her surprise, when Jack had appeared in the Stayre library.

"Well, truant, what does this mean?" she said gayly, as she offered him her hand.

"A holiday."

"For what?"

His answering laugh was a little shamefaced, as if at his own egotism.

"It's my birthday," he confessed.

Sidney's left hand followed her right one into his strong grasp.

"Allsortsof good wishes! Why didn't Day tell me?"

"Probably because she didn't know it."

"Day not know?"

He shook his head.

"I didn't say anything about it at the house. I was afraid they'd make some sort of a row about it."

"I know; but Day loves to make a row," Sidney remonstrated. "Really, Jack, it wasn't quite fair to her not to tell."

"You think so?"

Sidney gave a quick, decisive little nod.

"I know so. In Day's place, or in Rob's, I should be hurt that you didn't tell me about it. Still, let's not quarrel; it was nice of you to tell me, at any rate. What are you doing to celebrate?"

"I'm here," he answered briefly. "Isn't that enough?"

"For me, yes," Sidney responded; "but not for you. Let's go for a walk in this sunshine. Really, I am turning you out of the house for your own safety, for Bungay and the twins are at war, to-day, and nobody knows where the next skirmish will take place, nor when."

Passing through the hall on their way to the door, ten minutes later, they chanced upon Phyllis coming down the stairs. The girl hesitated awkwardly for a moment, took a backward step, then came marching steadily towards them, her head erect, her outstretched hand cleaving the air a full half-yard before her.

"How do you do?" she said, without a trace of expression in voice or face. "Sidney says it is your birthday. I wish you much joy." And, dropping Jack's hand as she might have dropped a hornbug, she tramped onward towards the rear regions of the house.

And Jack had bravely repressed his mirth until such time as he was in the street and safely could give it vent. His mirth, however, left him as swiftly as it had come.

"Do you realize," he said abruptly, as they strolled slowly along the borders of the Park; "the change the year has made for me?"

"You mean?"

"That only a year ago, I was wearing the blue uniform," he reminded her.

"Are you sorry to have lost it?" she asked demurely.

"Hardly. Is a fellow ever sorry to change from the life of a tramp cat to a snug chimney corner?" he queried, with sudden energy. "I'm as near content as a human being can be."

"How near is that?" Sidney demanded promptly.

"Just far enough off to wedge in an unfulfilled dream or two," he made answer as, in obedience to the girl's silent gesture, he turned to the right and came under the bare trees of the Park.

"Then you dream dreams, too?"

"Rather!" he answered briefly.

"I thought only girls did that. Do you tell yours?" she asked, with swift curiosity.

For an instant, he looked keenly down at her as she tramped on at his side, her long, free step swinging in perfect rhythm with his own.

"If you'll tell first," he assented.

She shook her head.

"But mine are so vague," she objected; "or, at least, they are in so many parts that all hang together. If I must sum it up, though, they are for some sort of a busy way of living. It frets me to be idle, and there aren't so many things a girl can do. I don't seem just to fit into any of them, either."

"That won't go," Jack assured her. "It's altogether too vague. Try it again."

Without slackening her step, Sidney frowned thoughtfully at the pavement at her feet where bars

of cloud and sun, marked off by the shadows of the bare trees overhead, formed a species of ladder up which they seemed to be passing towards the open stretches of sunshine beyond.

"It is vague," she assented, after a moment's thought. "I suppose I do have dreams, we all do, for the matter of that; but, beyond keeping busy and being of a little use now and then, they don't take much shape. I am afraid I am having too good a time to think much about what's coming after."

Jack studied her once more. Then he admitted her truth.

"That's just it. I can't see how you do it, though."

"Do what? Enjoy myself?"

"The way you do, and not think about what comes after, what's bound to come."

"Jack," abruptly she faced him; "you are worrying."

"Yes."

"What about?"

"The mother."

"Is there any reason?"

"No, and yes. That's where the dream comes in," he said slowly, after an interval.

Turning her head, Sidney stared long at the tall figure by her side, took note of the pressure of the thin, firm lips, of the anxious pucker about the level brows. Then she let her eyes fall to the ground again, and clinched her hands inside her muff.

"Tell me, what have you heard from her lately?" she asked.

Jack's answer came a bit drearily.

"The old story that is bound to come to us all. She hasn't been as strong, this last winter, and she mourns for me. I suppose it isn't strange; I'm all she has left, and she is growing old, older than you would think, because she didn't marry young. She's never been the same, since my father died. I saw the change in her, when I came home. Ever since then —" He fell silent, and his keen, kind eyes were clouded heavily.

"Well?" Sidney said at length.

He roused himself.

"You'll think I'm dull, to-day," he said, with an apologetic laugh. "For the matter of that, I am. Perhaps I'm getting old and forgetful."

With a little smile, a little gesture, Sidney brushed his words aside.

"About your mother?" she reminded him. "Ever since then?"

Secretly Jack compared his companion with the other girls he met, girls who expected to chatter while it was his place to listen.

"Ever since then," he went on steadily; "she has worried more, things have gone on her nerves, she hasn't been as happy. And, all this time, I've had a little dream of my own that, some day or other, I could have her with me in a home of our own. It would have been very good, you know."

"And can't you?" Sidney asked, without wasting useless words of sympathy, or even understanding.

Jack liked it better so.

"I've been counting on it, all this year," he answered frankly. "In one more year, I counted, by working hard and not spending so very much, I could have her down here with me. My salary is a good one. Mr. Argyle told me, only last week, that it would be better still by June. And so, without saying anything to people here, I wrote to the mother."

Sidney's face lighted in anticipation of the good news he was about to tell.

"At last!" she said eagerly. "Then you have begun to dream true."

But Jack shook his head, heavily, sadly, and, as he answered her, his shoulders drooped and lost their soldierly carriage.

"The answer came, to-day," he said drearily; "and I've dreamed true too late. She says she isn't strong enough to take the journey, even. What's worse, they say she may never be. And that," as he faced her, Sidney was startled at the sudden desperation that looked out of his dark eyes; "and that, Miss Sidney, has been my birthday present, my only one."

Jack dined at the Stayres', that night. Neither Sidney nor her mother would consent to his going away, and he yielded after the barest semblance of demur. To tell the truth, he was blue, depressed and dull, and, for the hour, the cozy simplicity of the Stayre home suited his mood far better than the

Argyle luxury could have done just then. He demurred about accepting the invitation; but, once it was accepted, he sank back into the shabby Morris chair with a sigh of content.

"You're good to have me about," he added gratefully. "I'm not hilarious company, to-night."

"All the more reason you should stay with us," Sidney assured him briskly, for she had been quick to realize that, with his disappointment fresh upon him, he felt in no trim to meet the merry chaff of Day and Rob.

However, when at last he let himself in at the Argyle front door, Day met him in the hall, and her eyes were rebuking.

"How could you?" she asked, while she waited for him to take off his coat. "You might have known we'd want you here, to-night."

He raised his brows in silent question.

"Of course, we know it is your birthday," she went on. "Rob counted up, this noon, and made it out. You know we were talking about ages, weeks ago, and you said it was just two weeks past your birthday, last year, when Rob went to get you to be introduced to Daddy. We had been flying, all the afternoon, to have a festive dinner ready, and then you went walking off with Sidney."

"I didn't suppose you would know," Jack defended himself.

"Did Sidney?"

"I told her."

Day coloured. Then her real sweetness triumphed.

"One always does tell Sidney things," she averred. "I do, myself. Still, do you think she cared about it any more than Rob or I would do?"

And Jack made honest answer, —

"No, Day; I don't."

Alone in his room, that night, Jack crossed the floor to stir the fire, then dropped down into a chair where he sat long, his head resting on his hand. In spite of Sidney and of Day, the young fellow felt lonely, homesick and depressed. After all, kind as his friends were to him, he was in reality alone, an alien in a foreign country, his mother ill and his future plans in tatters. The keen brown eyes grew vague, then dim, and impatiently Jack brushed his fingers across them. As he raised his head and straightened up his shoulders in defiance of his passing lack of courage, his glance fell upon a little packet which lay on the table at his side.

Carelessly he stretched out his hand and drew it towards him. Then, of a sudden, his whole face lighted, as he read the few words written on the card that lay atop.

"From Rob and Day," it said; "*with birthday greeting to their adopted brother.*"

And Jack, lonesome no longer, brushed the little card across his cheek before he put it carefully away within an inner pocket.



“‘I do wish I could do the things you do,’ Day said, enviously.”

Page 239.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“I DO wish I could do the things you do,” Day said enviously.

“Why can’t you?” Sidney made unfeeling answer, as she dragged the step-ladder two feet to the right and once more mounted its insecure summit.

“Why — I just can’t,” Day said blankly, for no one had ever put the case to her before, and her reasons were still unformulated.

Sidney demolished a cobweb on the ceiling, then attacked the top row of books along the library wall.

“You’ve the usual number of thumbs and fingers,” she said composedly. “Besides, anybody can flap a duster.”

“I should say so,” Phyllis made aggrieved comment from the floor. “That’s the theory you go on; and you just stir up the dust, without taking any of it out. Now, if you would just wipe things softly and shake the — ”

Sidney cut in remorselessly upon her sister’s lecture on hygienic housekeeping.

“I should live to a grand old age, and make everybody’s life a burden by my neatness,” she responded. “Meanwhile, I am just banging down the dust for you to wipe up softly and shake out. Day, if you

feel any yearnings to help, there's a pile of fresh dusters behind the hall door and dust enough to go around. Still, if I were you, I'd keep tidy and look on."

Day laughed.

"That's another of my grievances, Sidney. You not only do all sorts of things; but you contrive to keep yourself immaculate while you are doing them. If I sat in a corner and tended my handkerchief, all day long, I couldn't keep so starchy. How do you do it?"

"Soap suds," Sidney returned prosaically. "Still, I never noticed you were given to being mussy. How is Jack?"

"Worrying about his mother, poor old boy!" Day said, with sudden gravity.

Sidney wrinkled her brows, partly from sympathy, partly from her efforts to maintain her balance on the narrow topmost step.

"Do you suppose she really is so ill?"

Day opened her eyes in surprise at the question.

"What else could it be?" she asked.

Sidney brought two books together with a sounding whack.

"I hoped she was making a fuss about nothing at all. People do, sometimes, and then find out that nothing especial is the matter, after all," she explained. "Jack is so plucky, too. It's all too bad."

"Daddy is going to send him home, right after Easter," Day said, as she picked up a duster and a handful of books.

Sidney turned about abruptly.

"To stay?" she asked, and there was open consternation in her tone.

"Of course not. I believe the office would stop, if it were not for Jack. My father couldn't breathe, without his help. But he'll be gone for two or three weeks; longer, if necessary. He hasn't had a real vacation since he came, you know."

Sidney pushed the books aside vindictively.

"I'm afraid this won't be much of a vacation. He's working hard and needs the change; but this may not do him any good."

Day sighed and dropped her duster.

"Oh, dear, isn't it horrid?" she said. "When you can do anything you want, it's such a shame you really can't do the least thing for your friends, when they're in trouble."

The words were runic; not so the meaning, however, and Sidney was about to reply when Rob's voice hailed her from the doorway.

"Hullo! What's all this vale of tears?" he inquired, as he came strolling into the room hard upon the heels of Bungay who had met him at the door. "Also, what's all this flapping of banners? I'm no conquering hero, and that square of pink spotty cloth isn't the flag of any known community, as far as I'm aware."

"We are housecleaning," Phyllis observed, from her corner.

"Hullo, Phil! I neglected to see you at first.

How's your majesty, to-day?" Rob queried, as he lowered himself to the Morris-chair cushion which lay, wrong side up, in the middle of the floor. "Go easy, Bungay; that's my rickety leg. I say, Day, does this sort of thing get loose at our house?"

"Of course it does, only you aren't there to see," Day answered hastily, lest Phyllis seize the occasion to cast slur upon the Argyle neatness.

"I'll take jolly good care in future not to see," Rob said fervently, choking the while over the cloud of dust which Phyllis was supposedly shaking outside the open window. "Oh, I say, go round to leeward, while you're about it, Phil." And, catching up a newspaper, he made himself a cap which he gravely donned as protection to his yellow hair. "Do you girls often act like this?" he inquired then.

"It's our annual festival," Sidney assured him, from her seat on top of the ladder.

"I'd schedule it for the twenty-ninth of February, then, and dock it off the other years. Is Day helping?"

"No. I only wish I could," she answered promptly.

Rob put out his hand, seized her and drew her forcibly down beside him on the edge of the cushion.

"Oh, I wouldn't. It's very smudgy," he said calmly then.

"It's better that we should be smudgy than to have the house unclean," Phyllis observed sententiously, as she attacked a fresh row of books.

"Yes," Rob said, with unabated tranquillity; "you'll wash. But what's the row with the house?"

"Rob! Don't show your ignorance," Day besought him. "Phyllis will think we're never clean. Don't you know mother has the house gone over, every spring and fall, and things washed and aired?"

"Of course; but that's not half so spectacular as this. Why don't you get up on top of a ladder and flap things, Day?"

"She is probably waiting for you to set her the example," Phyllis said pertly, regardless of Sidney's signals to her to hold her peace.

"I can't. I'm weak in my legs, like Sidney's ladder; I can only sit here and advise. Sidney, that last book is seven-ninths of an inch out of plumb. What are you going to do, when you get this done?"

"The hall and parlours."

"Oh, I begin to see what you're at, Phil." Rob nodded sagaciously. "You work on the principle of a snowplow, shove the dust along ahead of you, till you get it out in the street. I suppose that's what makes the summers so dusty. When did you begin this spree of cleanliness?"

"Last week. It will take us all this week to finish."

Rob whistled, while he twisted Day's loose ends of hair into a series of diminutive pugs around the cheek turned towards him.

"Jove!" he said. "You must be very clean, or very much the other thing; I'm not sure which.

Sidney, I'm all devotion to you; but I'm glad I'm not sharing your rooftree in these latter days."

Sidney made a ball of her duster and cast it down at him.

"So am I, for you take up an unconscionable amount of room, and I am nearly ready to sweep," she answered, as she prepared to dismount from her lofty perch.

"All right. Just say when, and I'll see that Day goes aloft. I begin to understand things now. I met Wade down town, this morning, and he said he was dining at the club, to-night."

"Yes, the sinner! He'd much better come back here and help," Sidney said, while she brandished the broom at the comfortable-looking pair on the floor.

"Sidney!" Phyllis's accent was rebuking. "Wade isn't strong, you know."

"Neither am I," Rob retorted; "and you just tried to rope me in. What in the world do you want, Sidney? I'm no hen; I decline to be shooed."

"I want you and Day to get out of my sweeping. Excuse this apparent lack of hospitality; but I am expecting to get through in time to array myself in my best frock and eat some of Amy's dinner."

"Shall you wash your hands first?" Rob queried, as he rose to his feet. "Day, would we best get out entirely, or do you suppose that ladder carries double?"

"I propose to try it," Day returned. "I am getting interested in this work. Sidney, how many things can you do? Last month, you made the twins

each a new gown, and, to my certain knowledge, you cooked the dinner twice, last week. How do you do it all?"

Sidney laughed.

"Necessity — and pride," she answered succinctly.

"Which is which?" Rob inquired, as he cautiously mounted the ladder, lugging his cushion with him.

"Food is necessity; clothes are pride. What do you propose to do with that cushion?"

"Spread it out on the top step, and then sit on it. I don't feel at home, anywhere else. It's mine by right of possession." And Rob settled himself upon his insecure foundation and made place for Day at his feet. "I'm ornamental, you know," he added; "and I delight in seeing you be useful."

"Look, then. I'm too busy to talk." And Sidney wielded the broom with violent industry.

From his perch, Rob contemplated her with an approval which was only half mocking. In truth, Sidney made an attractive picture as she moved lightly about the room, her sleeves rolled up to her round, dimpled elbows, her bright hair bound in a gay bandanna kerchief and her brown skirt tucked up to show her trim brown shoes. Her face, meanwhile, was lighted with the gayety of their talk and flushed with exercise and health. In some fashion the secret of which was known to herself alone, she contrived to look as trim and fresh as ever in her life; and Rob, watching, felt a half-formed regret that none of the boys who had seen her dancing at Amy's party

could look down as he was doing, upon the pretty picture that she made. Then he dismissed the wish, and decided that he preferred to keep the picture for himself alone. Up to that hour, Rob Argyle had associated housework with age and shrunken shoulders and sloppy skirts.

In the meantime, Sidney was wholly absorbed in the free, strong play of her own broom, in the little line of dust which moved steadily ahead of her across the brightening carpet. For the moment, she quite forgot her guests, perched up out of harm's way, forgot they might be watching, perchance with eyes of criticism. Then, as she deftly rolled the line of dust into a narrowing heap and beckoned Phyllis to bring the dustpan, Rob gave a portentous sneeze.

"Beautiful!" he made grave comment. "I couldn't have done it better, myself. How long before the clouds will roll by enough to make it safe for me to come down?"

"Oh, an hour or so. You'd best stay where you are," she answered gayly.

"And then will Phyllis wipe us softly up and hang us out of the window?" Day made irreverent question. "If so, I think we'd better be going."

But Sidney interposed.

"Wait," she said; "I've finished now. Come into the other room. I want to talk to you about my party."

"Didn't know you were going to have one," Rob said, as he prepared to descend.

"Yes. I want to do something for the people who have been so nice to me."

"Laudable; but what's the use?"

"To even things up a little," Sidney said, as she led the way to the next room.

"I thought you were above that sort of thing," Rob answered bluntly.

"What sort?"

"Social swappery," he replied, as he dropped into a chair and sat looking up at her with a shade of disappointment in his blue eyes.

Sidney felt the disappointment, felt it and sought to justify herself.

"I don't think anybody is above it, Rob. We none of us like to take so much more than we can give."

"But you don't."

Sidney smiled.

"I have been accepting invitations, all this winter long," she reminded him.

"What if you have? You've done your share back again."

"Me? I've done nothing, not even asked Amy Browne to lunch."

Rob frowned.

"You haven't needed to. Instead, you've done your share in going to things, and helping make things go. Amy and the others wanted you; you went. They got what they were after, and now I don't see what more you ought to do."

But Sidney shook her head, and her laugh held its own note of dignity.

"Rob," she said; "that's arrant nonsense."

"It's not nonsense, either. Do you suppose, when I'm out with Jack, I don't get more than enough out of him, out of his talk, out of —" he hesitated for an instant; "out of the way he looks out for me and never forgets me, a dozen times more than enough to make up for the odds and ends I do for him? Besides, with friends, one doesn't keep accounts."

Bluntly he spoke, and, speaking, he faced her fearlessly, although he felt sure his words would rouse her opposition. Instead of that, however, she nodded across at him in obvious agreement.

"Not with a friend like you," she answered quickly. "All winter long, I have had the best possible time with Day and you; you've done everything for me, and it doesn't worry me in the least. I know you've enjoyed it just as much as I, and that's a lot. But with the others, it's different. They aren't friends, the way you are. I like them, and they've been nice to me; but I'm not willing to have it stop there. I want to show them that I liked it and, as far as I can, want to make it nice for them."

"But what's the use?" Rob protested. "They've had their innings with you already."

Day spoke suddenly, from the corner where she sat enthroned among the heap of sofa cushions which Phyllis had taken from the dismantled library.

"I know how Sidney feels," she interposed. "I

should be that way, myself, even if there isn't any need of it. Of course, Rob, you and I don't count; but with Amy and the other girls — "

Sidney cast upon her a look of gratitude.

"That's just it, Day. I have a brain or two, myself, and I think I know how it has happened, better than Rob thinks I do. If it hadn't been for you two people, Amy and the other girls would have let me sit in a corner till the end of time."

"Then what makes you so everlastingly grateful to them?" Rob asked shrewdly.

Sidney lifted her head and spoke with pride.

"I'm not grateful, Rob, not, at least, to them. I am to you. With them I'm not grateful; I merely want to pay my honest debts. With you and Day," crossing the floor, she dropped down at Day's side; "there isn't any debt at all — that I could ever pay."

For an instant of silence, Rob contemplated his toes with frowning intentness; but Day's arm stole around Sidney's waist, and the eyes of the two girls met in a look of perfect understanding.

"Sidney," Phyllis's voice sounded in the open doorway; "I do wish you would go up to the bathroom, quick. One of the twins has been sailing boats in the tub, and she can't turn off the water nor get out the stopper, and everything is flooded. And Bungay has just broken father's largest bottle of ink and — "

"Roll him on the floor, then; he'll soak it up into his clothes, and then you can put him into the tub and soak it out again," Rob made practical suggestion,

as Sidney fled up the stairs in the direction of a distant sound of splashing. "Sit down, Phil, and entertain us like a lady."

"Can't. I'm busy."

"Let the busy keep."

"I believe in finishing your work, before you begin to play," Phyllis said severely. "Besides, it is almost noon and time for Wade."

"Time for Wading, I should say, by the look of the twins," Rob observed, as one drenched form and then another went scuttling past the parlour door. "Never mind, though, come and sit down and rest yourself, and help us plan about Sidney's party."

"I didn't know she was going to have one," Phyllis answered, with manifest disfavour.

"Neither did we, till now."

Phyllis shut her lips and started to stroke back her hair with the old gesture. Then, suddenly recollecting the loose locks which graced her forehead, she desisted.

"I should have thought she would have told her own family, first of all."

"She did. She told us."

"Hh! You aren't related." Phyllis's tone was dangerously akin to that of Bungay when a mood of opposition lay upon him.

"Only by adoption. My ancestral monkey ate the nuts on your family tree, and so that makes us cousins," Rob explained blandly.

Phyllis disdained the explanation.

"When is she going to have her party?"

"I don't know."

"What sort of a party is she going to have?"

"I don't know."

"Where is she going to have it?"

"I don't know."

"Whom is she going to have?"

"I don't know."

Phyllis glared at him with a fierceness which was lessened by the smooch of dust across her right cheek.

"Do you think she is going to have me?" she demanded disdainfully.

"I don't know."

Phyllis straightened herself and thrust her arms akimbo.

"Well, I must say, you don't know so very much, yourself," she exploded.

With the same tranquil calm which had marked the cadence of his unvarying reply, Rob rose to his feet.

"Exactly so," he assented. "That's one of the ways wherein we show our kinship. Day, since you urge me, I'll be going."

And, arm in arm, the brother and sister took their departure, leaving Phyllis to glower after them in wrath too deep for words.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"SIDNEY is going to give a party," Phyllis announced to Wade, that night.

"Is she? When?" Wade glanced up from his book, as he asked the question.

"She hasn't deigned to tell me anything about it," Phyllis said, with a hostile sniff.

"Well, she probably will, when she gets ready," Wade returned placidly, and then he resumed his reading.

Ruthlessly Phyllis broke in upon it for a second time.

"But she has told Rob and Day."

"Has she?"

Wade's unruffled tone ruffled Phyllis still more.

"Has she! Yes, she has. What's more, I think it's a shame," she burst out.

This time, Wade looked up and closed his book.

"What is a shame, Phyllis? Don't you want Sidney to have a party?"

"I don't want her to go babbling about it, all over the city."

"Has she?"

"Yes. She's been and told the Argyles all about it." In her irritation, Phyllis neglected to recall

Rob's answers, that very noon, to her own searching questions.

Long since, Wade Winthrop had learned that laughter had no place in a successful argument with his young cousin. Nevertheless, he did laugh now, as he reflected upon Rob and Day, regarded as all the New York population. Then speedily he repressed his ill-timed amusement.

"What did she tell them?" he inquired, hoping by this question to divert Phyllis from her main point.

Instantly Phyllis mounted upon her dignity.

"How should I know? I wasn't listening around the corner," she said severely.

"I beg your pardon, Phil. But how did you know she told them, then?"

"Rob gave it away. He never could keep a secret; boys can't," Phyllis made disdainful answer. Then, catching her cousin's eye, she sought to amend her phrase. "Of course, you may have done it, when you were young," she added more gently.

"Perhaps," Wade assented gravely. "Still, it is so long ago, I can't well remember. But the party, Phil, when is it coming off?"

"I told you I didn't know a single thing about it," she responded sharply. "Sidney never tells me anything."

"Do you know why?"

"I suppose because she thinks I'm not worth the trouble," Phyllis muttered vindictively.

"It is because you never tell her things, nor act

as if you were interested in what she does," Wade assured her, with a smile which took the sting from his arraignment.

"I don't see why I should be interested," Phyllis grumbled.

"Sisters?"

"Yes, I suppose so," she assented grudgingly.

"And almost the same age?"

"Three years apart," she corrected him instantly.

"Yes. And we are fourteen," he reminded her.

"Wade! Not truly?"

"I'm an old fellow, fully twice your age, Phil; but you are interested in what I do. At least, you say you are."

Phyllis summed up the situation with refreshing brevity.

"Yes; but you are different."

"I'm sorry," Wade said in all seriousness. "I'd like to be like Sidney."

"I don't see why," Phyllis grumbled again, although she was quite well aware of Wade's reason. "You're nice enough, as you are, even if you do think Sidney is an angel."

"But I don't. Sidney is much nicer than any angel," Wade replied composedly.

Phyllis sought refuge in sanctification.

"I can think of nothing nicer than an angel," she observed and, as she spoke and from sheer association of ideas, she clasped her hands upon her narrow chest.

"Odd! I can." Wade spoke musingly.

"What?"

"A live girl with a large sense of fun and a larger sense of honour."

"Oh!" Phyllis digested the pill in silence. Then she returned to the charge. "I do think she might have told her own sister," she iterated.

"So do I."

Phyllis interrupted him.

"Then you don't think Sidney is perfect, after all."

"I never said she was. Besides, you interrupted me. I was going on to say, if the sister asked her." Then, weary of the skirmishing, Wade suddenly advanced to the attack. "Phil, what in the world is the matter with you? It is ever so long since you have had such a cranky fit as this. I was thinking, only the other day, you'd left them off entirely. Really, I'd drop them, Phil; they are horribly unbecoming. Besides," he laughed a little; "they'll give you wrinkles."

"Who cares?" she asked tartly.

"I do. I'm not going to have my young cousin spoiling her face, just when she's beginning to improve. Moreover, I'm not going to have her maligning Sidney. She is she. You are you. You each have your own friends, and I notice you don't always tell her your own plans as soon as you get them made," he concluded, in a final outburst of arraignment.

Phyllis was always prone to the unexpected. Now she braced herself and took Wade's blame fairly and without flinching.

"No; I don't," she admitted.

"And turn about is fair play, except when the game goes against you? Cheer up, Phil," he added. "Honestly, child, you are improving, and I'm a good deal proud of you. Don't mess things by getting cranky now."

She had been standing beside the table, fidgeting with the books and with the paper-knife. Now, however, she made a swift step forward, and dropped down on the arm of Wade's chair.

"Wade, I do try," she said brokenly; "but — but it isn't easy."

Wade's arm slid about her waist with just the gesture it took in welcoming Sidney. For an instant, he was silent, looking up into his young cousin's face and studying the changes that the past four months had wrought there. The face was gentler than of yore, the old frowning lines about the brows had lost somewhat of their tensity, the corners of the lips were slowly turning upward. Yes, in spite of her passing storms, Phyllis was improving, and the improvement was by no means all contained in the increased trimness of her dress, in the softer arrangement of her hair. Wade studied her with keen and loving eyes, for, during the past four months, he had come to care genuinely for the prickly, tempestuous child who now was leaning against his shoulder. Then, at length, he made assent.

"No, Phil; it isn't."

"You don't know much about it, though," she went

on swiftly. "It isn't fun to be queer and homely, to be the odd one, even if you have brought it all on yourself. Things are better than they used to be, I know; but — Wade, you've done it all."

Old as he was, and busy with a man's engrossing interests, Wade yet coloured like a boy at this sudden outburst from taciturn Phyllis. Then, laughing a little, he shook his head.

"You've done it, Phil, done it for yourself. I only punched you up and made you start."

Once more he was surprised, as her hand shut on his hands, hard and tight.

"Then punch me up again, and keep me going," she begged, and her humility, simple as that of a little child, sat well upon her arrogant young shoulders. Then, with a swift recoil, she came back to her usual brisk speech. "I wonder who will be there," she observed, as she rose, crossed the room and dropped into a chair.

Wade realized that the gentler mood was ended; he had sufficient tact to make no effort to prolong it beyond its natural life. Instead, he picked up his magazine and, balancing it upon his knee, turned over the pages, while he looked across at Phyllis.

"It's bound to be one thing or the other," he said carelessly; "either her old set, or the new. I rather think, by her telling Rob and Day about it, that she means to have their set, Amy Browne and the others."

"I don't see what she can do with those people." Phyllis's tone was too thoughtful to savour of hostility.

"Why not?"

"Because she can't give them anything half so nice as the things they have, all the time."

Wade looked up to meet her thoughtful blue eyes squarely.

"Not half so elaborate, perhaps; but just as nice," he corrected her. "Perhaps, a good deal nicer. Money isn't everything, child."

But already Phyllis had shifted her ground.

"Do you suppose she will have Jack Blanchard?" And her voice showed her dislike of the idea.

"Probably."

"I can't see why everybody is so taken with that br— creature." Phyllis made hasty substitution of her final word, as she caught her cousin's disapproving glance.

The disapproval lost itself in a laugh.

"No more than I can see why you aren't taken with him," Wade told her.

"It's because he's—" Phyllis hesitated; then her innate and fearless honesty carried the day. "I rather think it's because I'm a little jealous." Then she sat up rigidly again. "Anyhow, if he is there, I won't go."

This time, Wade yielded to the temptation of taking the wind out of her sails.

"Perhaps Sidney may not plan for you, anyway," he suggested, and Phyllis suddenly bethought herself that it was time for bed.

Wade called her back from the threshold, though, and took her hand into his.

"Little cousin, don't get huffy with me," he said then. "Good night, child, and make me a promise."

"I will," she agreed rashly.

"Good. This is it. Very likely Sidney won't have a place for either of us at her party. You are almost too young; I am immensely too old. But, if she does ask you, you'll go to help on the good time as much as you possibly can?"

Her face fell.

"Wade, I won't," she answered flatly.

"It's a promise," he reminded her.

For a long minute, she stood there struggling between her perversity and her conscience. Then she raised her head.

"Yes," she admitted grudgingly; "I did promise, and I never break a promise."

Then she departed for bed, leaving her cousin to sit long before the fire, pondering upon the criss-cross lines of her character, seeking in vain to discover the best way to untangle the knots. Underneath all the thorns and brambles, Phyllis Stayre was made of good stuff, he assured himself. Months before this time, he had taken his own assertion chiefly upon faith. Now, however, watching the child keenly, clinging to every sign that marked her wayward growth, Wade felt that faith was being lost in sight. Phyllis Stayre was no angel, neither was she, to quote her cousin's phrase, nicer than any angel. Nevertheless, now and then and upon rare occasions, an angelic attribute peeped forth from

the most unangelic soil. And Wade, watching the buds and caring for them, yet sighed a little to himself as he sought to reckon up the time before such feeble buds could send out a perfect blossom. Sighing, he threw aside his unread magazine and went in search of Sidney. None the less, his final thought, that night, was not for Sidney, but for his unregenerate young cousin, Phyllis Stayre. Could the bald truth have been told, Wade had come to care for Phyllis by sheer dint of worrying about her sins and fighting the forlorn hope of all her battles. Years afterwards, he found his payment.

Phyllis was again in his mind, next day, while he was scouring the down-town streets in search of a city official who resolutely shunned an interview. Instead of the official, he met Jack Blanchard. Jack's way was also his, and side by side the two young men walked southward, along the rushing tide of lower Broadway. Beside them, the din of the streets drummed deafeningly upon their ears; at their left, a strident hum of voices rose and fell from the lips of men hurrying to and fro around the mouth of Wall Street; but above their heads and above all the din and hum, the chimes in Trinity tower were sending down their mellow call to morning prayer, a call that cut sharply athwart the ceaseless clamour of the Street which opened just across the way.

"It's not so out of place, either," Jack observed, without preface. "It makes a fellow stop and think, just when he's busiest."

Wade understood. He nodded, and they walked on without speaking, until the bell was still. When once more the din of the streets was uppermost, he spoke.

"Blanchard, you know Phil?"

"Rather."

"What do you think of her?"

Jack's reply came promptly.

"That she's the most extraordinary young person it has ever been my luck to come across."

"Yes," Wade made thoughtful assent. "She's all that. Sometimes, though, I think she may be something more."

Jack laughed.

"At any rate, she's too much for me," he said. "I get the worst of it, every last time I run up against her."

Wade stuck his hands in the side pockets of his short coat and tramped on for an entire block without speaking.

"Yes, I should rather say you did," he replied then. "It's not easy to get the best of Phil, and there is no reason you should be especially ashamed of getting the worst of it. She has endless ingenuity in thinking up the worst possible thing to say. Still —"

Jack interrupted him, thoughtfully and with a little smile curving his lips.

"When I came down here," he observed; "I thought I had made up my mind to expect anything whatsoever of an American girl: but Phyllis outdoes all my expectations."

"Mine, too, and I only came from Beacon Hill," Wade answered, laughing. "Still, as I was about to say, Phil barks and snaps a little; but she doesn't often bite."

For his only reply, Jack lifted his bent arm and cast an expressive glance up his sleeve to the spot where Sidney's penitential stitches still adorned the lining.

"I know. She lost her head, that night, and made all sorts of an idiot of herself," Wade admitted frankly. "You have no especial cause to love her, Jack. And yet, I do wish you'd not sit on her too hard."

"I? I let her alone, when there's a chance for me to get the other side of a door," Jack responded, with a literal truth born of several hair-breadth escapes.

"In judgment, I mean," Wade answered. "Of course, I know it's a good deal like giving a criminal extra rope and letting him hang himself; but — the child can't hurt you, Jack. You don't care for what she says."

"It depends on where she says it," Jack replied a little grimly.

"Not if she shrieks it in the street," Wade dissented promptly. "The Argyles are so well known that people are beginning to know you. Knowing you, that's enough. Nobody knows Phyllis, and she shows she is nothing but a child. Of course, she still hangs on to the brakeman microbe; but she'll drop that in time, and nobody believes it, anyhow. If they did, what harm? For the matter of that, what

harm if you had been? But, about Phyllis: she's not all bad, Jack."

"No," Jack agreed benevolently; "she is merely a little unexpected."

"Exactly. I don't wonder that you hate the child. In your place, I'd have ganned her long ago. At least, that would have silenced her, and mere kicking in the air never does any hurt. But the child knows you hate her, and that only makes her worse."

"I don't hate her," Jack said jovially; "I only pass her by on the other side."

"It comes mighty near amounting to the same thing, though," Wade observed. "I don't blame you in the least, mind you. In fact, I'd do the same thing in your place, as I say."

"Wade," Jack faced him suddenly; "you've a bee in your bonnet. Out with it, man."

Wade's laugh was a little bit shamefaced.

"Fact is," he admitted; "I've worried about Phil till I have actually come to where I tolerate the child. When I came down here, nothing but my wanting to stay near Sidney — Jack, that girl is a tonic," he broke off abruptly.

His brown eyes upon a distant square of pavement and his lips shut tight, Jack nodded shortly.

"I wanted to be in the same house with her," Wade resumed. "Nothing else would have made me put up with Phil for the space of an hour. As it was, I let her alone as one lets a toad hop around, untouched. In fact, I thought as little about her as I could, except

when she got in Sidney's way. It wasn't till this last fall that it seemed to dawn on me that nobody could be so crossgrained, all through. It wouldn't be a possibility; and, more for the fun of it than anything else, I tried to find the girl's soft side."

"And got yourself stung in the process," Jack commented briefly.

"Yes, a half-hundred times or so. Then I made up my mind I wouldn't give in. And now—" Wade paused expressively.

Jack capped his sentence for him, unsentimentally, but in pithy fashion.

"Now you've hooked your scorpion, you don't know how to let go."

"I don't want to let go. Jack, the child isn't half bad."

"Maybe not," Jack responded dubiously. "Still, she must be fully seven-sixteenths."

Wade laughed.

"Don't be too hard on her, though, Jack," he added. "It's not like you to be that way."

Jack stuck his hands in his pockets and faced him.

"Now you look here, Winthrop," he said. "I'm a man and a British subject, and I have a corner of a right to live, even in America; but Phyllis can't accept the fact. I never have done a thing to the child to make her hate me."

"Exactly," Wade assented. "It's none of my business, old man; but have you ever done anything to make her like you?"

Jack pondered.

"No," he answered, after an interval; "I can't say that I have."

And Wade, in thinking over the matter afterward, admitted to himself the rare frankness and freedom from rancour that marked Jack's reply. Now, however, he was too much absorbed in the question involved in Phyllis to heed lesser details.

"Try it," he advised his companion briefly.

And Jack's reply was equally brief.

"Thanks, I value my scalp."

"I still wear mine," Wade assured him.

Jack's next reply was drowned by the roar of the streets, and Wade made out only the final phrase, —

"— but you're a relation."

"Unhappily, yes; only that the relationship necessarily includes Sidney," Wade responded. "It's a good deal of a responsibility, Jack."

"What did you take it for, then?" Jack made unfeeling answer, though his eyes belied the apparent hardness of his words.

"Because I couldn't live in the same house with the little wretch and see her cut her own throat," Wade confessed.

"No; it wouldn't have been decent," Jack agreed. "Now look here, Winthrop, I'm not so hard on the little beggar as I sound. I don't want any harm to come to her. If she were in hot water, I'd help fish her out. However, that doesn't mean I'm willing, as long as she's cocky and walking on her toes —

likewise on everybody else's toes she can — it doesn't mean I'm willing to pick her out for a chum. You can do as you choose; but, for my part, I prefer Sidney."

"Of course. Who doesn't?" Wade's accent was final. Then he added, after another interval, "She's only a child, Jack, and we're grown men. Is it worth our while to get on our nerves about her?"

Jack's laugh caused more than one passer-by to turn his head.

"Then what makes you do it, man?" he demanded.

And then, for his corner was reached, he went his way and forgot Phyllis Stayre entirely, forgot even his laughing assurance to Wade that he would help to fish her out of hot water, when the need arose. Happily for him, he had no notion of how soon that need was destined to arise.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THREE days later, Sidney saw fit to divulge her plan in its entirety. She saw fit to speak, one April evening when Rob and Day, dashing in, breathless, from a sudden shower, had come upon herself and Wade, deep in a game of chess before the library fire. Across the room, Phyllis sat buried in a book, and the light, striking across her pale brown hair, her deep red frock and her intent young face, brought out new lines of girlish attractiveness to which, less than a year before, Phyllis Stayre had been a total stranger.

She looked up, as Rob and Day, drenched and hilarious, came bursting into the room.

"Do!" she said briefly.

"How!" Rob made prompt reply. "That's right, Phil; make the other fellow do his share."

"Share of what?"

"Exuberant greeting."

"Hh!" Phyllis observed. Then she returned to her book.

"I am so glad you are here," Sidney said, when they were settled in a semicircle before the cozy blaze. "I was going to telephone you, to ask for a council of war."

Rob clasped his hands across the head of his stick, and faced her.

"As to what?"

"My party."

"At last!" Day said, with frank interest. "We've been eaten up with curiosity, Sidney, and we finally came to the conclusion your plan had fallen through."

"Why didn't you ask about it, then?"

"We didn't däst," Rob answered promptly. "We were afraid you weren't going to ask us."

"I'm not," Sidney replied unexpectedly, as she bent forward and seized the stick which Rob was aiming at her in threatened vengeance.

"Oh, fie!" he rebuked her. "Mean trick to show us the pudding, and then not hand over a single plum."

Sidney laughed.

"More than that, I expect you to bring the plums, yourselves. You and Day are to come to help."

"Help?" Rob inquired.

"Help make it go. I'm no use, and neither is Wade."

"Thanks," Wade remarked, from his corner. "This is the first intimation I've had that I was to be invited."

"Or even that I was to have a party at all; isn't it?" Sidney asked.

"No; Phil told me."

"How did she know?" Sidney cast a curious glance in the direction of her sister who, to all appear-

ance, was too much absorbed in her book to heed the conversation.

Rob raised his hand and snapped his fingers, after the fashion of the country school.

"I done it," he confessed. "You never told me 'twas a secret, and I leaked it into Phyllis's left ear."

"Well, that's no matter now," Sidney reassured him. "I didn't mean to say anything till I had talked it over with my mother; and, for obvious reasons, I thought I'd wait for that until the house-cleaning was done."

"But you told us," Day said practically.

"Yes. The idea had just dawned on me, and I had to tell some one, or burst with its importance." Sidney laughed, as she spoke, for Rob had queried softly, —

"Swept it up, Sidney?"

"No. I swept it down from above, like all good things," she retorted. "Now listen to my plan. I'm going to have about a dozen besides ourselves, just the people who have invited me and danced with me, all winter long."

Rob looked up expectantly.

"Who make up the dozen?" he asked.

"Oh, Amy and the rest; and, of course, Jack."

Rob's face cleared.

"You'll have Jack, then?"

And Sidney made swift answer, —

"Why, of course."

"Good for you! I wondered, though."

But Sidney turned upon him in sudden exasperation.

"I hope you didn't think I'd have people here, and leave Jack out."

Day interposed quickly, for she knew that the two strong wills were clashing upon their tender point.

"It's only," she said, and a little note of girlish gentleness crept into her voice; "it is only because Jack has said to us all so often that he doesn't fit in with the rest."

But Sidney answered proudly, —

"I should be a poor sort of hostess, if I couldn't make him fit; at least, for one evening. When I don't ask Jack Blanchard, I'll not be Sidney Stayre."

Rob rose and stood facing her, his hands in his pockets and his back to the fire.

"You always were a trump, Sidney," he said approvingly. "I wish there were a few more of your sort."

"When are you going to have it?" Day asked, as Sidney sent an answering nod to the boy before her.

"Some time in Easter week."

"Next week? You'll have to hurry up about it, if you mean to count on Jack."

"He's really going, then?"

"Yes. Wednesday. Dad insists he needs the change. Nobody knows, though, what he'll do without the fellow. All his life, he's held the reins, and now he keeps dropping them off on Jack. I

don't know that I wonder, though." And Rob paused to meditate upon the matter, his blue eyes alight with love for his friend. "Did it all myself, too," he added. "I discovered Jack, and I stuck him down the paternal throat. Dad swallowed him like a little man; and then wasn't I scared for fear the dose wouldn't agree?" And Rob paused again, this time to chuckle reminiscently.

"Yes, you've one good thing to your account, Rob," Sidney assured him.

"Make it a pair." Rob held up two fingers, as he spoke. "I introduced him to you."

"Bungay did that. You merely certified the introduction. But what does Jack hear from his mother?" Sidney asked, for she had been too busy, the past few days, to have a glimpse of either the Argyles or of Jack himself.

"Better. He had a letter, last night, that said she was better than she had been for two years. You ought to have seen the fellow; till then, I really hadn't any notion how much he had been worrying," Rob said, with sudden gravity. "It takes a good deal to make a sober fellow like Jack Blanchard lose his head and behave like a seven-year-old kid, the way he did, last night. It showed the awful load he's been carrying, all this time."

And Day added thoughtfully, —

"Yes, and he's been so plucky about it, too."

And Sidney echoed her words. Older than Day, seeing deeper than Rob had done, she had realized

to the full the burden of anxiety which Jack had been carrying for the past two months. In the first hour of their meeting, she remembered now, Jack had spoken to her of his mother, spoken with the little reverent accent which many a young man is too proud to use. Since that time and before his birthday, he had often talked of the little Canadian mother who, alone in Toronto, lived in the record her son was bidding fair to make. Then had come Jack's birthday, bringing in its train the bitter disappointment. From that time onward, Sidney had never failed to feel a stiffening of her throat when she recalled their talk together, the look of dumb sorrow in Jack's keen, kindly eyes. In looking back to that day, the girl was always conscious of a dull regret that, hearing of her friend's trouble, she had done nothing more to help.

However, Jack's memory was different. And, as the spring days had rolled by, he had had many a long talk with Sidney, telling her of his mother, reading scraps of her letters and gaining fresh courage from the girl's blithe, sympathetic interest in all that concerned himself. Even the very night before, in bringing his more reassuring news, had brought with it the prompt resolution to seek Sidney in his earliest leisure moment. His earliest leisure moment, however, had not come until that evening, and then his intention had been forestalled by Day's announcement, as dinner drew to an end, that she and Rob were going to start for the Stayre home, as soon as

they left the table. Nevertheless, he refused their invitation to go with them. Now and then Jack Blanchard had a curious sense of being quite alone and kinless in the busy American city where every one else appeared to have kin in every street. In such moments, he had learned that he gained his swiftest cure after a talk alone with Sidney Stayre. With others, Sidney could chatter with the best. Alone with Jack, or Wade, or even Rob in one of his rare moods of seriousness, the chatter failed, and the strong, sweet nature of the girl stood forth in quiet dignity, a dignity too great for many words.

Something of that same mood was still upon her, as, alone by the fire, she sat thinking of Jack now. Rob and Day had gone, Wade was in his room, and Phyllis, across the room, was so still that Sidney had quite forgotten her presence. For the time being, she was looking into the coals and seeing there two kind brown eyes beneath their level brows, two thin, clean-cut lips which, despite all their efforts, were not entirely steady. She lifted her head abruptly, as a muffled sniff fell on her ears.

"Phil! Why, what's the matter?"

Angrily Phyllis jerked off her glasses and then jerked the back of her hand across her eyes.

"Nothing."

Sidney glanced over her shoulder, followed the glance with a long look, then held out her hand.

"What is it, dear? Come here and tell me," she said, and all the gentleness of her mood was in her voice.

"It's nothing, truly. I'm — I'm only an old fool," Phyllis made testy answer.

Sidney hesitated, half rose from her chair, sat down again, then rose and crossed the room.

"What is it, child?" she asked in wonder, for rarely had she seen Phyllis cry.

But Phyllis only shook her head. Nevertheless, she yielded to the touch of Sidney's arm around her shoulders. And Sidney, even in her wonder at her sister's grief, had a sudden realization of how rarely in her life she had dared to lay a caressing hand upon her tempestuous young sister.

"What is it, dear?" she asked again.

"I — I only hoped you'd want me, too," Phyllis wailed in one tragic outburst. "I sat here, and heard you plan it all out, and take in Wade, and Jack, and everybody else, and — and — you never — said — a — single — word about — me."

And then Sidney understood.

"Phil dear," she said, an hour later, as Phyllis lifted her tear-stained face from the shoulder where it had rested so comfortably in its unaccustomed place; "I've been a good deal to blame; but I never supposed you cared. I'm sorry, dear; but I know you better now. Let's kiss each other, dearie, and start again." And, in after years, neither one of them ever lost the memory of that first girlish kiss of mutual understanding and good will. Then, arm in arm, they went away up the stairs together.

With characteristic promptness, Phyllis fell asleep,

that night, before her lashes were fully dry; but Sidney lay awake for long, staring at the darkness and thinking about her younger sister. Wade had been right, after all, she herself wrong. Under the girl's thorny surface was a soft spot, and the soft spot was all sore with loneliness and baffled self-esteem and a sense of having no one to whom she could turn for absolute understanding. And then, all at once, Sidney's cheeks grew hot in the darkness, as she realized how it should have been herself, not Wade, who had first looked beneath the thorns. Self-reliant, absorbed in her more congenial relations with Wade and the Argyles, had she not been a little selfish, too? Was it not a little her own fault that Phyllis, left to go her way, had blundered into skirmishes with almost every one she chanced to meet? And Sidney had felt such keen responsibility for her cousin's content, for Rob's happiness, for Jack and Day, for everybody, in short, but Phyllis. And by rights they two, sisters and only three short years apart in age, should have counted much to each other. In reality, they had counted for nothing. Sidney punched her pillow with somewhat of the disgust she was emptying upon her own head. And, in the end, Phyllis had been generous in letting the by-gones slide into the past. Her good-night kiss, the first in many years, had held no reservations.

Sidney, staring at the dark with wide-open eyes, went over in detail their talk, dwelt in detail upon a certain honest frankness which, her first burst of

woe once over, had marked her sister's mood. Phyllis had made no effort to fix the blame. She had stated only facts and then, yielding to Sidney's coaxing words, shyly and with many pauses she had at last confessed how much she had craved for love.

"Phil dear," Sidney had interrupted once; "I never even dreamed of it."

And Phyllis had made straightforward answer, —

"I knew you didn't, Sidney, and that made it all the worse. If you'd been ugly about it, I should have hated you; but, when you didn't care, it hurt."

And at the recollection, Sidney gave the pillow another punch. Poor little old Phil! But, at least, it was not too late to begin all over again. Hereafter, if they went their separate ways, it should be Phyllis's own fault, not hers. And, with a long, deep sigh, Sidney dropped off into dreams.

Out of deference to Jack Blanchard's plans, Easter Tuesday had been set for Sidney's party. Her plans were simple: a scanty score of guests, progressive euchre and a chafing-dish supper, followed by a most informal dance. Day, in a wonderful new frock, was on hand early, together with Rob who, for the first time that spring, had cast aside his stick in honour of the event. Both the brother and the sister had taken on themselves a goodly share of responsibility which kept them from exchanging many words. However, just as the euchre playing ended, Rob halted behind Day's chair.

"Isn't it all exactly like Sidney?" he demanded, too low even for Day's partner to hear.

"Exactly. We couldn't make it go like this. Where is Jack?"

Rob laughed down into his sister's questioning face.

"Ask Esther Remick," he made terse reply. "Jack is holding his own here, too."

"Dear old thing! And he looks so stunning, to-night, in his new clothes."

Rob dropped down in the chair which Day's partner had left.

"Stunning or not, Day, he'll never look any better to me than he used to do in the old uniform," he said, with sudden thoughtfulness. "Jack Blanchard's clothes are a mere detail. It is Jack himself that counts."

"Rob," Day spoke with an earnestness that matched his own; "do you remember my birthday party?"

"To give a rousing good time to somebody who didn't expect it, and couldn't pay it back, next day,'" Rob quoted instantly. "Yes, Day, I do."

Leaning back in her chair, she studied him intently, losing, for the moment, her own theme in her pride in her big, blond, happy brother. And it counted much to her that, all these months, he had held in memory her careless words.

"It worked itself out rather well, Day," he was saying; but she ignored the phrase.

Instead, she bent forward and rested her two hands

on his, as it lay across the little table, fingering the heaped-up, disordered cards.

"Rob," she said impulsively; "I talk about Sidney and Jack and all the rest; but I believe that there's nobody else who really counts for much to me but you."

One by one, with chatter and laughter, the others had dropped away, following Sidney's lead towards the dining-room where the chafing dishes stood ready for their work. In the parlour beside the abandoned table, the brother and sister sat alone, and the room grew very still. For a long minute, and for another and another yet, they sat there facing each other above the disordered cards, the vigorous young boy, the dainty girl. Then, as their eyes met in one look of perfect understanding, Rob laid his other hand across Day's fingers. .

"Little girl," he answered, with a sudden tenderness which brought a darker, deeper light to his blue eyes; "I learned my lesson a good many months ago. There are plenty of other people; but there is just one Day."

Their hands and eyes meeting, they sat there silent, regardless for the moment that, as a rule, a party was not the place for the exchange of family affection. Then, of a sudden, Day drew back her hands and sprang upon her feet.

"Rob, what's wrong?" she demanded, and her voice was sharp with fear.

From the dining-room at the farther corner of the house, there had come a frightened, high-pitched little scream, the scream of the young girl who thinks

that, after all, not much is the matter. The scream, short and perfunctory, had been followed by a sudden clamour of many voices, dominated at last by two shrieks, the one of honest fear, the other of bitter pain. Only an instant later and before Rob's weak leg had steadied to his weight, Jack Blanchard came dashing through the door, caught up a heavy rug and dashed headlong back again in the direction of the clamour which was increasing fast.

"Rob! It's fire! Come quick. We may be able to help." And Day, white with fear, yet laid a steady hand upon Rob's arm and dragged him swiftly after Jack.

The hall seemed endless to her; the clamour seemed able to pierce the walls and roof, as they drew nearer to the door whence came the cries. Then, on the threshold, Day shut her eyes and leaned for an instant against Rob's sturdy shoulder. Her first hurried glance had showed her the scarlet flame creeping out in an angry little circle around the larger chafing dish, had showed her, too, the licking tongues of flame that crept and crawled and danced up one whole side of Phyllis's soft, thin frock. Her second glance had showed her Jack, casting the rug about the girl and bending down to roll it even more tightly yet about her writhing form, just as Esther Remick, springing backward, collided with the other dish and turned the blazing alcohol straight down upon them both, deluging them both beneath a rain of fire which broke into a flaming rainbow as it fell.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"NOBODY but you and Jack, dearie," Sidney answered gently, as she bent over Phyllis to give her a drink of water.

"And was Jack — " The words stuck fast in Phyllis's throat; but the terror which was in her eyes completed the unspoken question.

Sidney hesitated. Then, —

"A little bit more than you were, Phil," she confessed.

The glass clinked against the girl's shaking teeth. Then she drew back her head and pushed the glass aside with an imperious gesture.

"Tell me truly, Sidney. I must know. How bad is it?"

"It's not dangerous, dear. He is badly burned, and he may be in bed for quite a while. He'll come out of it, though, in time."

"Truly?"

"Truly."

There came a long, long silence. When Phyllis spoke, her voice was pitiful in its appeal for good news.

"And not be scarred, Sidney?"

Purposely Sidney misunderstood her.

"No, dearie," she said as lightly as she was able.

"The doctor said you wouldn't show a scratch anywhere."

"I don't mean me," Phyllis said, with a touch of her old temper. "It wouldn't do any harm, if I were; I never was much to look at. But Jack, will he be scarred?"

Child as she was, her glance was compelling, and Sidney felt herself forced to answer truly.

"A little."

"Much? Tell me it all," Phyllis demanded sharply.

"A good deal."

"Where?"

"On the side of his face."

"Sidney! Surely? Isn't there anything that can be done?" And, regardless of her swathed condition, Phyllis sat upright and stared at her sister with anguished eyes. "Not anything?" She dropped back again and buried her face in the pillow. "And he did it all for horrid, ugly me!" she moaned. "Sidney, what can I do?"

"Get well as fast as you can, dear," Sidney made soothing answer, for she was shocked by the girl's sudden grief and alarmed lest the excitement bring back the fever which had followed the nervous shock and the pain of the burns. "Then you can go to see Jack, and tell him how grateful we all are."

"Tell him!" Phyllis's tone rang hard in its scorn. "Words can't tell things, Sidney, not the real things one feels. And, all the time he's been here in New York, I've treated him just as abominably as I knew

how to do, not for any reason, either. And now," once more the pillow muffled her voice; "and now he's saved my life and made himself ill, and spoiled his good looks for ever and ever and ever."

"Perhaps not so bad as that, Phil," Sidney made reassuring answer.

"How much, then?" Phyllis demanded breathlessly.

"They can't tell how much yet. One cheek may be scarred a good deal, and it may even run up across his eyebrow. It is too bad; I am as sorry as you are."

"You are not," Phyllis contradicted her, in a fresh wave of grief. "You didn't do it. I did."

"It was my party." Sidney's accent showed that this was by no means the first time the accusing idea had occurred to her.

"What of that? You didn't joggle out the alcohol in the first place, and you didn't go and dip your sleeve into it, either. It was all my fault. I was ugly and horrid before, and then I was careless; and Jack has got to pay the penalty of it all." And Phyllis writhed with a pain which did not come entirely from her own burns.

Sidney laid a steady hand upon the restless brown head.

"Phil dear, you must try to keep as quiet as you can," she said firmly. "I am sorry, too, more sorry than I can say. It is all dreadful; but, even now, it might be worse. Jack might have been burned to death, if it hadn't been for Wade and father. As

it is, he will be laid up for a while, and he may have some scars; but it was really a wonderful escape for you both. Let's try to think of that, dear, and forget the rest."

"I can't forget it, Sidney." Phyllis's voice was high and insistent.

"Then try to think about the better side of it," Sidney urged. "Try to keep as quiet as you can, Phil, and rest. Do it for your own sake, dear, and a little bit for Jack's."

"Jack's?" Phyllis looked up with wondering eyes, and Sidney saw that she had unwittingly touched the right chord.

"For Jack's," she repeated. "Grow strong as fast as you can, Phil, and then perhaps there will be something you can find to do for poor old Jack." Her own voice dropped a little over the final words.

Obediently Phyllis yielded to her touch, yielded and closed her eyes. For long she lay so still that Sidney thought she must have dropped to sleep. Then, as Sidney stirred, the girl opened her eyes once more.

"Sidney, you're good to me," she said slowly. "I — I wish I hadn't always been a little beast."

Meanwhile, in the Argyle house, a trained nurse in cap and pinafore was ruling over Jack's room, and Day herself was ruling over the trained nurse.

It was now three days and nights since Rob's insistent summons had brought his father to the telephone. Mr. Argyle had grown white to the lips as he

listened to the short, crisp message. A moment later, he was leaping into the automobile of the friend who chanced to be calling on him; and, before he fully realized the nature of his errand, they were stopping to pick up the doctor on the way, then speeding through the city streets towards the Stayre home. Rob met him on the steps. He too was ashy white, and a blue ring outlined his lips; but his voice was quite steady.

"Dad! At last! Jack's in the parlour. I'm afraid it's pretty bad."

Then, for there was nothing he could do, he had gone in search of Day. He found her hidden in a corner, her face buried in her crumpled skirt; but she made no resistance, as he drew away her hands.

"Day," he said quietly; "there'll be lots of things for us to do, to-night. I think you'd better get your cloak, and we'll go home and help mother put Jack's room to rights for him, before they bring him home."

Jack himself never remembered anything of that wild rush for home. Another doctor had come for Phyllis; the Argyles could do nothing there, and the doctor declared Jack would better be moved now than later on. The streets were wellnigh empty at that hour, and even the doctor held his breath as they tore madly along the deserted pavements, cutting the stillness with their clanging gong whose insistent note seemed to the men behind to bear its tragic message into every nook and cranny of the silent streets. Nevertheless, the doctor had ordered

haste and that the utmost, and now it was not for him to flinch. There was risk in such a speed as theirs; but, as he glanced down at the stalwart figure huddled against his side, down at the honest, earnest face, he felt that the risk was rightly taken. Burns such as those were not to be toyed with. Moreover, he had seen Jack often, and seeing, he knew he was well worth the saving.

It was a night of turmoil at the Argyle house. The nurse was there by midnight, and the doctor stayed till dawn.

"Don't spare anything," Mr. Argyle had bidden him briefly. "Blanchard is my own right hand. Save him at any cost." And the doctor had nodded, as he had tossed aside his coat and bared his arms to work.

It was not until late the next afternoon that Day was admitted to Jack's room. All the morning long, she had hung about outside his door, begging to be allowed to go inside, if only for a moment; but the nurse had merely smiled and shaken her head. As yet the girl was too unsteady from the shock to be permitted inside the room. Late in the day, however, she pulled herself together with an effort, and showed herself, smiling bravely, to the nurse. For a long moment, the woman looked down into the wan face; then she said, —

"Come; but only for a minute."

Once inside, however, Day remained. From the threshold, she had heard Jack's feeble hail, and, sum-

moning all her courage, she had crossed the room to take his hand, sturdily resolved to make good her welcome by bringing to him what blitheness she could. The day was dying and the light was too dim for Jack to make out her pallor. He only saw her smiling lips, and heard the merry, saucy words of greeting which brought the dimples to her cheeks, turning her to the semblance of the Day he knew so well. And Day never winced, although it was taking all her girlish strength to stand there, talking merry nonsense, while she was looking down upon the face before her, white as the folds of linen that covered more than half of it from sight. As so often happens, though, her strength rose to meet the strain she put upon it. For an instant, she bent down to smooth the pillow and touch the crisp brown hair with gentle, strong hands; then she straightened up once more, and stood looking down at Jack with eyes that never faltered.

"It was just exactly like you, Jack," was all she said; but Jack's hand came out from under the blanket and shut upon her fingers.

Later, she turned to the nurse.

"You'd best go down to dinner now," she said calmly. "I will see to Jack."

And, much to Day's surprise, the nurse went. Neither Jack nor Day, however, had seen the woman's careful scrutiny of her young assistant, the way she had taken note of every blithe, carefree word, every deft touch, every answering smile that had crossed that fraction of Jack's face which she had left in

sight. For twenty critical minutes, Day's fate, in so far as the sickroom was concerned, had trembled in the balance. At the end of twenty minutes, the nurse had gone away without demur, to eat a leisurely dinner and take a half-hour sleep.

"Steady as a die, and tender, too," she told the doctor, that same night. "It is going to be a long, hard case, and she will be invaluable, before we are through. He needs the child to keep him from worrying about himself, and the time will come, before so very long, that she'll be worth a dozen doctors."

And now it was two days later, and once again the nurse had gone away to dine and rest, leaving Day in full possession. This time, Rob was also in the room, settled in a great chair beside the bed, with Day curled up on the floor at his feet, her cheek resting against her brother's knee. Jack, propped up against a heap of pillows and looking for all the world like a half-unwrapped mummy, surveyed them benignly from his one available eye.

"What is the news from Phil?" he asked abruptly at length.

"Coming up like a bramble in her usual unsuppressable fashion," Rob answered, as he folded his arms at the back of his head. "Day, I am devoted to you; but do just hitch your brains along a little bit. My foot is going to sleep."

Obediently Day moved her head across to the other knee, while she made languid comment, —

"Somehow I never seemed to get up much worry over Phil."

"You did all right, the other night," Rob reminded her. "I had you hanging in a soggy bunch all over my arms, young woman."

Day cast a mocking glance up at the swaddled figure in the bed.

"Oh, that was just for Jack, you know. I was afraid he'd spoil the Stayres' best rug."

"I was more afraid he'd spoil himself," Rob observed. "What were you asking, Jack?"

"Whether Phyllis really is much burned."

"Not nearly so much as you were." Day rose, as she spoke, and took a chair beside the bed where Jack could watch her without effort while she talked. "It is uncomfortable, of course; but it isn't very deep, thanks to you, and the doctor says she'll be up and about the house in a day or two."

"Where did it catch her?"

"In her arm and shoulder. Sidney says it is the worst just above the elbow."

"Likewise in her conscience," Rob struck in. "Wade says she is beating her breast over the ruin she has made of you."

"Serve her right, too," Day said a little sharply. "She's always been detestable to you, Jack; she doesn't begin to deserve all you did for her."

With a slight shake of his head, Jack brushed her words aside and turned to Rob.

"Wade? You've seen him, then?"

"He's here, every night, to ask for you."

"Really?" Jack's face showed his pleasure.

"Sure. He is anxious to hear, of course. Besides, I fancy Sidney would send him, if he didn't come, himself. She's taking all the care of Phil, and she probably has her hands full; but she telephones, three times a day, as 'tis."

"At least, I can't complain that I'm not getting my fair share of attention," Jack observed. "Next time she telephones, tell her I'm all right, and will make my party call in the course of the next few weeks."

"She'll be here, herself, before then," Rob predicted. "She's a good sort to have around you, too, when you're lying up for repairs. I had a taste of it, last winter, when I was down here, and I found her a great source of consolation now and then."

But Jack's smile was all for Day.

"Thanks," he said tersely. "I'm content as 'tis."

There followed one of the long, long pauses which had come so often in those last three days. Strong and rugged as he had always been, the nervous shock had told upon Jack to a surprising extent, and as yet there had been no cessation in the pain of his burns. Weakened by both the shock and the pain, Jack was able to talk but little and at fitful intervals, broken by silences when his lips shut tight together and his colour changed from white to dark, dark red and then to ashy gray. In intervals such as that, Day watched him in silent pity, either sitting motionless with bated

breath, or else resting one cool, firm hand upon his restless fingers, while Rob, powerless to help, could only shut his eyes and wait for the interval to pass by.

Suddenly and out of the silence, Jack spoke again.

"Day," he asked; "how much is this going to make a mess of my manly beauty?"

For eight and forty hours, the girl had been dreading the question. Now that it had come, she parried it without flinching.

"Vain creature! Not so much as you might think."

He smiled.

"That depends on what I'm thinking. I don't mean to funk a side issue; but I'd rather not be too hideous. Just how bad will it be, Day?"

Too late, the girl regretted that she had abandoned her old place on the floor at Rob's knee. There, Jack could only see her profile; now he could search her full face for the pitiless, cruel truth. Nevertheless, she tried to evade his question.

"We can't tell yet, Jack; but we hope it may not be so very bad."

His lips tightened. Then he spoke again.

"Hope. Hm! Then it means *yes*." He drew a long, deep breath. "Sorry," he added briefly. "I haven't any beauty to waste. In a case like this, it's supposed to be the decent thing to cart off all the mirrors. You haven't done that, so I suppose it might be worse." Evidently he was talking at random, to gain time to steady himself. At last he

turned to Rob. "Tell me the exact, literal truth," he demanded then. "It's mean to work it out of Day; but you're a boy and don't mind."

"Mind!" The word came through Rob's shut teeth.

"Not so much. Besides, you've had your own bad times, and know it's easiest to get the worst over as soon as possible," Jack told him. "Out with it, then. I'm to be scarred?"

"Yes."

"Much?"

"A good deal."

"Where?"

"The left eyebrow and temple."

Jack sat up sharply.

"My eye is all right?"

"Yes. Truly, Jack, there isn't any trouble there," Day assured him hurriedly, for she read the terror in his voice.

Sternly he turned upon her.

"Sure? It's not a time for lying," he said, and the terror was still in his voice.

Quickly Day rose and, moving to his head, sat down beside him and took his hand.

"Jack," she said steadily; "as I am living and sitting here by you, your eye is safe. Since the very first night, the doctor hasn't had a bit of fear. No, listen. It's better you should know just how it is. Then you won't worry, when we're not here to ask. That first awful night, the doctor didn't know just what had happened to you; it all looked rather bad.

Now, though, the worst is over, all but the pain. It is going to be a good while, perhaps, before you're up and out again; your cheek may be scarred. But, in the end, you're coming out all right."

Jack's face was turned towards her; his look was appealing.

"On your honour, Day?"

"Yes, Jack, upon my whole honour."

He settled back again against the pillows and lay quite still, watching the changing colour in her cheeks, the gentleness of all her girlish motions.

"Day," he said quietly at last; "this hasn't been an easy telling for you, child."

"No, Jack; it hasn't," she confessed. "I hate the hurting you."

"I'd rather you did it than anybody else, you and Rob," he answered. "If one turns baby, he'd rather do it when only his best friends are about. I never was much on beauty; but I hate the thought of being too hideous. Day," he started up again, as a new fear crossed his mind; "it won't knock me out in my work; will it?"

"Nonsense." Day laughed a little, as she spoke, and the laugh steadied all their nerves. "My father would think he needed you and must have you, if you'd burned your head completely off. No; you'll be back in the office long before we go out to Heatherleigh."

"Praise be for so much!" Jack returned, and his voice had a trace of its old hearty ring. "I could

put up with a good many other things in life a good deal more easily than giving up my work. If that's all right, and my eye is safe, I'll pull through the rest, somehow or other."

Day, leaning on her elbow and playing with the hem of the pillow-case, was on his swaddled side and out of range. Rob, however, watching her acutely and marvelling at the girlish courage which had held out through these last hard moments of question and reply, saw two great, shining tears fall on the pillow at Jack's side, and yet another two. Seeing, he held his breath in fear. If Day gave in now, Jack would be convinced that all her reassuring words held only the scantest grain of truth. And Rob knew more than Day, for he had heard the *ifs* which had framed in the doctor's verdict. If Day's courage had failed her, he knew he could never force himself to take her place. Hour after hour, he had grown sick at heart, as he had sat there beside the silent, plucky friend for whom he had learned to care with a love second only to that which he had long since given Day. Rob Argyle was no coward; neither did he lack the will to stand by his chief friend in the black hours of illness. Nevertheless, he knew quite well that, in a case like this, a woman's nervous strength is needed. And now Day's tears were dropping fast.

Jack, meanwhile, lay very still, his lips shut firmly and his one useful eye fixed upon the opposite wall. At last, however, he turned his head to speak to Day,

and Rob's breath grew short with fear. But Day was ready for him and, with a sudden gesture, she buried her face out of sight among the pillows.

"Oh, Jack, for shame!" she gasped, with a nervous little giggle which sounded quite genuine to his anxious ears. "The idea of going through the Boer war safe and sound, just to come to utter destruction on a lobster newburg!"

And Jack's laugh, echoing hers, had its wonted jolly ring, in spite of the swaddling folds of linen that covered his blistered, aching face.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IT was middle May; and Jack Blanchard, conventionally clothed as to his body, but with his face still resembling a half-unwrapped mummy, had been for a drive in the Park with Amy Browne. Jack had felt no especial drawing towards Amy and her hospitality, and had already refused four or five invitations to drive with her, offering every possible excuse from feebleness to vanity. His last excuse had vanished, however, when Amy had stopped, one day, to inquire for the shut-in invalid, to meet on the threshold the invalid, happy and hilarious, just returning from a drive with Day. After that, Jack confessed to himself that his fate was in Amy's hands. She was a pretty child and a kindly one; he had no wish to hurt her by a curt and reasonless refusal of her offers. He writhed a little over her evident wish to make public retraction of her former disregard of him; nevertheless, he argued that there had never been any especial reason she should have noticed him before, nor was there especial cause for her noticing him now. She was merely a warm-hearted little girl who felt that she had never been too gracious to Day's friend. Now that the friend had proved his worth, she was eager to show her appreciation.

Jack had laughed a little, yielded, and gone for the drive.

Jack had been down-stairs for ten days now, and was already slipping back into his old place in the family routine. The office, however, was still debarred, for the doctor, using every effort in his power to diminish the scars, still kept Jack's face in a mummified condition which would have been most unseemly, viewed above an office desk. Reading was still a good deal out of the question, too; and Jack spent his hours in idle lounging about the house, in going for a daily drive and, as the evenings grew warmer, in walking with Rob under the trees in the Park which every day was turning to a deeper, richer green. It was a monotonous sort of life at best. Jack took it with exemplary patience, laughed at the shortness of his present tether and tried to look forward with good hope to the future. None the less, he confessed to himself that the long, idle hours bored him to the very verge of mutiny. The Easter holiday had ended; Rob and Day were back again at work, straining every nerve to come through the final run victoriously and enter college with flying colours. Every spare hour they owned they gave to Jack. They even, for his sake, broke in upon their habit of preparing their lessons side by side, in order to double the time they could devote to his amusement. Sidney, too, was equally busy, for, in addition to her own school work, she was much at home with the younger children who appeared to

be vying with one another as to which should have the most colds and develop the greatest amount of consequent fractiousness.

Left to himself, then, and to his own curtailed resources, Jack found his drive with Amy far less of a bore than he had given himself to expect. Frivolous and dainty, Amy was yet kindness itself, once her girlish sympathies were aroused; not even Day herself could have shown a greater care for his comfort. True, she had no especial interests, and her brain was about as much developed as that of the average guinea fowl; but she owned a good deal of quaint and ready wit, and her gay chatter was unfailing. Added to that, absolute leisure, some beauty and great and good-tempered tact made the girl no mean companion for a drive through the warm May sunshine. Jack stretched his long legs out at ease, and answered her chatter in kind until his years dropped off him and he seemed to her a great, jolly boy and born of her own set.

"Are you tired?" she asked, as they reached the northern end of the Park; "or shall we go on to Riverside?"

"I don't get tired any longer. I stopped all that, a week ago," he answered.

Amy nodded to the coachman. Then she said, —

"You'll be as well as ever, before you know it."

"All but my manly brow," Jack told her, with a little smile which somehow made Amy realize that her heart was constructed of something besides saw-

dust. "I haven't seen it yet; they don't encourage my gazing at myself, but I fancy it is in a good deal of a mess."

"It may be a good deal better than you think," she assured him quickly.

"Also it may be worse. Still," he added philosophically; "at least, it will be a comfort to get my other eye out of cold storage. Even the best absorbent cotton becomes monotonous in time."

There was no dropping of his voice, no minor cadence. Three weeks before that day and alone in his room, Jack Blanchard had made his moan once and for all. Owning two keen eyes and a mirror, he had not failed to know that, while not a wonderful beauty, he yet possessed more than his own share of attractiveness. It was not easy for him, just as his life was opening out before him, to have that attractiveness snatched from him, all in an hour and from such ignominious cause. A leaky chafing dish, hired to match Sidney's own, a careless jostling of the lamp, a blazing muslin frock: all these were trifling details; but, for Jack Blanchard, their results were mounting mountains high. Nevertheless, Jack was of good stuff, well trained. It had happened badly; but he would accept it as it came. Whining never helped a bad matter to right itself.

And Amy, shallow, kindly Amy, listening to his brave young voice, had a swift glimpse of all that it implied. She turned to him with girlish impulsiveness.

"Jack, you're very plucky," she said.

He laughed out in his old hearty way.

"Not so very. Besides, there's no especial sense in tearing my hair, even if I could get at it. I can't say I enjoy my present decorations, though."

"When do they let you out?"

"Two weeks, the doctor said."

"Jack, it's endless," Amy protested.

"Pretty near. Still, it may prove worth the while. They say I'm not so appalling a vision as I was at first."

"And then you'll go back into the office?" she asked, trying to draw the talk away from dangerous ground, for Day had been in the room, during one of the doctor's visits, and Amy knew what Day had seen.

"I think so, for the present. I want to go home, when I can; but I'd better be a little more — steady first."

"Surely. You were going, the day after you were burned."

Jack nodded.

"Yes. That's been a worry, too. My mother needs me, needs to see me, that is. I feel I ought to get off, as soon as I can."

"Why don't you go, as soon as the doctor lets you out of cotton wool?" Amy demanded.

"Because," Jack's one available eye was on the shining azure band of the river, far beneath; "because the mother's getting old, and she's more or less bound to worry. At best, when she gets a look at me, it's going to be something of a shock. Can't you see

how it is? She mustn't feel it too much; it would be the worst thing for her, at her age and all. And I can hold her a good deal more steady, if I have had a little time to get used to it first, myself."

And Amy, watching the determined profile, listening to the quiet, grave young voice, nodded in perfect silence, for she dared not trust herself to speak.

The long May afternoon was waning, when Amy left Jack outside the Argyle door. As he entered the large reception hall, he started towards his room, then lingered irresolutely before the open fire which purred softly on the great brass andirons. There was nothing especial for him to do in his room, nothing, in fact, anywhere just now. Dropping down into a chair, he stared into the blaze and devoted himself to thinking about Amy. After all, his dreaded drive had been a pleasant break in the general monotony of things. Moreover, he was ready to confess to himself a sneaking liking for Amy herself. She was by no means altogether a dunce, and she had been, for the most part, the blithest possible companion. Moreover, Jack, while hating coddling, was wholly human. He admitted to himself that Amy, shorn of her blitheness, had been in the sweetest mood of all. Yes, he was ready to count Amy as a friend, although as yet he had no notion of the good turn Amy was about to do him. Afterwards, he was glad he had thrown away the last shreds of his antagonism to Amy just when he did.

His musings were interrupted by a whirr of the

bell, and, before he could get on his feet and vanish out of sight, the door flew open and Phyllis Stayre swept down upon him, a Phyllis Stayre of unfamiliar guise. Lanky and freckled and spectacled still, she was yet transformed by a becoming frock and hat, by the loosened waves of hair that lay about her face and, most of all, by the great good will that gleamed in her pale eyes. Poor Phyllis would never be a beauty, did she live to six score years. Nevertheless, the past few weeks had borne her far on along the road to girlish comeliness. Her manner, however, was still characteristically abrupt.

"Hullo, Jackie!" she hailed him from the threshold. "Where have you been, all afternoon?"

At the hail, Jack turned and held out his hand.

"Hullo, Phil!" he said cordially. "Come in and talk to a fellow."

"What for, I'd like to know?" But, as she spoke, Phyllis dragged a chair forward to a corner of the rug.

"I'm lonesome."

Phyllis sniffed.

"You! You looked it, half an hour ago."

"When was that?"

"When you were trailing down by the Mall in Amy Browne's carriage. You are a nice friend, to cut me dead in the Park, when I was smirking at you till my ears tied themselves in a hard knot at the back of my neck."

Jack laughed unfeelingly, as Phyllis flounced down into the chair._

"Wait a week or so, Phil," he bade her. "Just now, I haven't any extra eye to waste on you."

"Not when Amy is about," Phyllis said a little morosely. "She is the prettiest girl I ever saw in all my life."

"Amy?" Jack's tone was a bit incredulous. "She can't compare with Sidney or with Day."

"Much you know about it," Phyllis made disdainful comment. "Day wouldn't be pretty, if she weren't an Argyle, and, as for Sidney, she has just one pretty feature and that's her feet. I declare, Jack, if you go on, you'll be calling me pretty, next I know."

"All right, if you'll return the compliment," Jack promised unexpectedly.

Her elbows on her knees and her chin on her clenched fists, Phyllis steadily contemplated him, as far as she could see. Jack, meanwhile, watched her lazily, watched the new alertness of her mobile face where strength and gentleness and humour chased one another back and forth by turns, as the girl's eager mind wandered swiftly to and fro.

"No," she said regretfully at length. "It's no use, Jack. You may be a dear; just now, everybody is calling you a hero, but you aren't pretty in the least. You're too pale, and you've three wrinkles around your eye, and — put your head down here, this minute."

Laughing, he obeyed her, and bent forward for inspection while Phyllis scanned his crisp brown hair.

"Yes, I thought so," she said then. "You've seven gray hairs just north of your ear."

"Pull them out, then," he bade her.

She shook her head.

"No use. Seven more would come to the funeral and, before you knew it, you would be brindled all over your head. Jack, it's deplorable. You're only twenty-four years old, and here you are with three wrinkles and seven gray hairs. You're getting old before your time." Playfully, while she had been speaking, the girl had been poking his hair this way and that. Now, of a sudden, her two brown hands shut gently on his head and turned his laughing face upward until it met her gaze. "And, Jack," she said, in a voice from which all merriment had fled; "I'm so afraid you've done it all for me."

It was now a good three weeks since the Argyle carriage had been sent, one morning, to bring Phyllis for her first call on Jack. She found Jack quite alone, for Rob and Day were at their lessons, the nurse had gone down-stairs, and Sidney, who had come with her in the carriage, had judged it best to allow Phyllis to go in by herself. The girl had pledged herself to perfect quiet, and resolutely she kept her pledge, although it had taken all her will to face the swaddled figure stretched out on the couch which stood across the sunny window. Nevertheless, Phyllis Stayre was always plucky, and she showed her pluck now as never before.

"May I come in?" she asked, as she halted just across the threshold.

"Phil! Is it really you? Come along and help

yourself to a chair," Jack answered cordially, for Sidney had told him how much Phyllis was dreading, yet longing for this visit.

"Yes. I wanted to see how you were feeling. I brought you some flowers." Phyllis spoke with constraint. "I hope you are getting better."

"Thanks, yes. What beautiful carnations! It's nice of you to bring them, Phil. Are you all right again?"

"Oh, yes. Nothing ever hurts me long." Phyllis showed a touch of her old manner; but it swiftly left her again. "Do you suffer much pain now?" she queried, with a stolid gravity which gave no hint of the way her heart bumped wildly, each time she met Jack's friendly gaze.

"Some. It's bearable, though. But we made a grand catouse, Phil." Jack laughed a little, as he spoke, hoping to assist the girl down from her uncomfortable pinnacle of manners.

"Yes, I am afraid we spoiled the party for everybody." Phyllis scowled at the tips of her brand new gloves.

"We did for ourselves, anyhow," Jack returned philosophically. "How did the rug come out, Phil?"

"Father had it buried, early the next morning. He said he couldn't bear to look at it. It had one dreadful hole," Phyllis replied categorically. "And my frock was completely spoiled."

The ghost of a smile flickered across Jack's lips.

"No matter, as long as you weren't spoiled likewise," he observed.

"I suppose not. It might have been much worse, if it hadn't been for you. I can never pay you back for all you did." The child congratulated herself that, without breaking in upon her promised quiet, she had at last reached the end at which she had been aiming from the start. She had determined to accomplish it, even though it should take all her strength and courage. Unhappily, though, both strength and courage failed her now; and, with a suddenness that took Jack by complete surprise, she buried her face in the folds of his sleeve. "Oh, Jack, I can't bear it!" she wailed. "I told Sidney I'd be quiet. I didn't mean to cry; but I can't sit there any longer, exactly like a stuffed doll, and say I'm sorry, when my heart is breaking. I can't, and I just won't!"

"But, Phil dear —" Jack stroked the brown head which shook with the sobs that refused to be choked back.

"My heart is breaking, I tell you," the girl went on fiercely. "It hurts me here and here, whenever I think about you. Ever since you came to New York, Jack Blanchard, I've been just as horrid to you as I knew how. And now here you are, ill and bandaged up and aching, and it's all my fault, all the fault of horrid, ugly me. Jack," she lifted her head for an instant; "do you realize I would have died, died in awful, screaming pain, if it hadn't been for you? And I didn't deserve it, either. I was horrid; and you — You saved my life and took all the pain I should have had. Jack, what can I say?"

Afterwards, in all her life, Phyllis never forgot the half-hour that followed, never forgot the utter anguish which swept across her, only to be lifted, bit by bit, by Jack's low, steady words, by the touch of Jack's caressing hand. For long, she kept her face buried in his sleeve, while the hot tears flowed fast until they trickled through and wet his arm beneath. At last, however, she raised her head to meet Jack's level gaze, meet it with a light in her eyes such as he had never seen there until then.

"Jack," she said solemnly; "you saved my life. It wasn't good for much; I've always been a cross thing and a cranky. But I'll promise you this: as far as I can do it, I'll do my best that some day you can say it was worth your while." And, bending down, she left one of her rare kisses upon his hand, outstretched to her in witness of her promise.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

EVEN the noisy bedlam of lower New York felt the charm of the May-time. The air was clear and mellow, and the smoke from countless chimneys rose up in straight, dark pillars against the blue heavens, leaving the city beneath untainted by their sooty vapours. As Day took her way down town, the roadways were still glistening from an early morning shower, and something of the freshness of the season and of the sunny morning seemed enveloping the dingy, heavy piles of masonry between which she passed.

In spite of the charm of the morning, however, Day's brows were knitted into an anxious knot, as she stepped from the lift into her father's outer office.

"Busy! But I want to see him," she said a little peremptorily. "Well, if it is a directors' meeting, I suppose I really shall have to wait."

Crossing to an open window, she leaned out over the sill, looking far down into the street beneath whence arose the strident din of the noisy human tide which still flowed on, racing, eddying, whirling on again, swirling to and fro to avoid some hidden obstacle, then rushing on once more, ceaseless, restless and unresting. It was the same old picture

which Day had learned to know so well: the swiftly-moving cars, the fretting horses, the unceasing tide of human life still tearing onward towards some distant and unreachable goal. And then, as she still leaned out over the stone sill and gazed down upon it all, there rang out above the din the mellow chime from the old brown Trinity spire. Listening, Day's eyes cleared, and the anxious pucker left her brows, for something in the mellow sound carried her back to one other morning, eight full months before, when she had sought her father's consent to her unusual birthday party. She smiled slightly to herself, recalling the success it had proved to be. And now this other plan —

“Well, Day?”

She spun about sharply. Her father was watching her from the threshold of the inner room.

“Have the directors all gone, Daddy?”

“Every man of them.”

She marched past him into the room and perched herself in the impressive presidential chair which made an incongruous setting for her slender self in her pale spring gown and wide white hat.

“I took this chair on purpose, Daddy. I intend to preside at this meeting,” she said audaciously. “Sit down anywhere.” And, with a gracious wave of her hand, she beckoned him to one of the chairs grouped about the lower end of the table.

“What now?” he queried, as he obeyed her gesture. “Another birthday function?”

"Daddy!" she protested. "Give me time. I don't grow old, twice a year."

"What then?"

"Jack," she answered unexpectedly.

"Jack!" her father echoed alertly. "Did he come down with you?"

"No; he didn't," Day said flatly. Then she leaned forward and sat facing him, with her elbows on the table and her chin in her palms. "Daddy, I came down here expressly to talk to you about Jack. You know the doctor said he wasn't getting on as fast as he ought to do, and asked if he had any worry or anything on his mind to keep him back. Well."

"Well. Has he?"

"Yes. I didn't know it until late yesterday, though. He went to drive with Amy, and told her many things. I saw Amy after that, and she told me many things. Then I lay awake, most of the night, and planned many things, and now I've come to have you ratify my plans."

"What sort of plans, Day?"

And Day, her chin still in her hands, launched into earnest talk. Amy had made over to her in detail all of her own conversation with Jack, the day before; and Day, putting that with other details, had been able to supply the clue to Jack's slow convalescence. Mr. Argyle listened, listened steadily and with increasing gravity. When the girl had finished her story, he sat for a moment, lost in thought.

"What do you propose to do about it, Day?" he asked her then.

"Get his mother down here, by some hook or crook," Day said readily.

"Will she come?"

Day's answer was intrepid.

"She will, if I bring her."

"You?"

"Yes, I," Day said firmly.

"But you can't go to Toronto alone, child."

"I don't propose to. There's Miss Margaret, that nurse I had when I was little. She's a lady; she knows how to travel as well as I do, and she would look out for me, I know."

"Mm-m. Well, perhaps. But suppose she wouldn't come?"

"Miss Margaret?"

"Mrs. Blanchard."

Day raised her head and let her clasped hands fall to the table.

"Daddy, don't I usually succeed in getting what I want?"

Her father's laugh filled the room.

"Yes, young person, you certainly do."

"Well, trust me now. Besides, there's Jack down here, and, if she's half a mother, she'll jump at the chance to come."

"If she's strong enough."

Mr. Argyle's tone would have been like a cold clouche to most girls. Not so to fearless Day.

"Daddy, listen. You have more money than I care to spend time to count. Every year, you give me more than I care to spend. What is the use of all your money, if you can't arrange a comfortable journey for one poor old woman, especially when you always say you never could get on without that poor old woman's son?"

Mr. Argyle smiled at her tone; but he yielded to her logic.

"I'll think about it, Day. It's not a bad idea, for I can see, now you speak about it, how the fellow is dreading to tell his mother what has happened. But ought you to be the one to go?"

"Why not, if I have Miss Margaret with me? Mother has other things to do; besides, she wouldn't be as good as I am. She would say one polite *Please*, and then stop. For me, I shall tease and tease and tease until I get her started."

"Rob could go, I suppose."

Day shook her head.

"I thought of that. I know he would be willing; but it wouldn't do. She would come with me, sooner than with a strange young man. Besides, Jack mustn't know a thing about it till she's here. If Rob went dashing off, he'd think it was strange; but girls are always doing things at the shortest kind of notice. No, Daddy, I hate to travel; but, this time, I'll go, myself."

Again her father pondered swiftly, deeply. Again he realized that Day was growing up, growing, too,

in her heedful planning for the comfort of others. It would be a short, hard journey for the girl; but Miss Margaret would be a host in herself, and Day would suffer for neither care nor safeguarding. He sat for a moment longer, staring across at Day, and tapping, tapping thoughtfully upon the table's edge. Then, rising, he went to his desk and took up the telephone.

"Day," he asked, over his shoulder; "if I order transportation for my car, to-night, can you be ready?"

Rob saw her off at the station, directly after dinner. Her explanation given to Jack had been most nonchalant.

"Such a lark!" she had said, as she was picking up her soup spoon. "I'm off for a three-day frolic. One of my friends, the mother of one of my friends, I mean," she corrected herself with an elaborate care which set Rob to choking over his soup; "is going to entertain me. Don't you wish you could come, too?"

"Day," Rob said, as he settled her in the car where Miss Margaret already sat awaiting her; "you're only a girl; but you're a good deal of a trump."

She laughed a little nervously.

"Wait," she bade him, as she put up her lips for his good-by kiss. "After all, you know, I may not take the trick."

Two days later, Wade dropped in upon Jack, on his way up town.

"Better, old man?" he queried.

"Much. My teeth are snicking together, though." Jack tried to laugh, as he spoke. "The doctor is going to take me out of cotton, in the morning."

"To stay out?"

"Yes. For better, or for worse. Come in, at night, and look me over. You may as well get used to it at the start."

His hat still in his hand, Wade stood looking at his companion with thoughtful, kindly eyes.

"Brace up, Jack, and keep steady," he said. "I know how it is, myself, this pinning all your plans on the point of a doctor's skill. I came through it, alive, and I've more than a notion you'll do the same. Things generally do come out a little better than they promise. I'll look in on you, at night, though, and judge for myself. Where is Day?"

"Don't know, worse luck!" Jack cast himself down in a chair. "Just when I miss her most, she's gone gallivanting off for a week end with some friend or other."

"Funny thing Sidney didn't speak of it," Wade observed. "I thought they both had some plan for to-morrow. They usually do foregather on Saturday afternoons."

"They won't, this week. Still, I suppose it's Day's last fling before she takes her final examinations. However, I wish she hadn't gone just now," Jack answered restlessly.

"'Tis too bad. A girl is a mighty comfortable thing to have about, in seasons of stress," Wade

assented. "I remember how I shadowed Sidney, the day before I went in for my examination. She gave me all the pluck I had, and then escorted me to the very door of His Specialship. Well, good-by, man. Keep up your courage, and I think things will come out better than you think for."

With a kindly nod which said far more than any words, Wade went his way. Inside his own door, he called for Sidney.

"Tids," he said gravely; "do you remember that last day at Grande Rivière before I went to see Doctor Cromwell? Well, Jack's bandages come off, to-morrow, and Day is away."

Sidney Stayre rarely needed explanations. Now she understood.

"I'll go down there, in the morning," she said, and she was as good as her word.

It was well on towards noon, next day, when a bebuttoned porter brought a yellow envelope into the inner office where Mr. Argyle bent above his desk. With leisurely hands he tore it open, read the half-dozen words, then took the receiver from the telephone beside him.

"Three-eight-three-five. Yes. Is Jack there? Can I speak to him? Jack? Oh, Jack, how goes it? Really? All right? Good. I am so glad to hear it. And now see here, Jack, Day will be home by the two-ten on the Central, and Rob is going out to Heatherleigh. Do you think you would be able to meet her? Yes, at two-ten. Thanks."

By two o'clock, Jack Blanchard, mummified no longer, was striding up and down the long platform at the western side of the huge station, waiting impatiently for Day. He had missed the girl acutely, more than he would ever have supposed it possible for him to miss any girl. Moreover, he had things to tell her, things to say that no one else, he felt, not even Rob, could rightly understand. His step rang sharply on the pavement, and his shoulders straightened at the thoughts which even now were bringing a smile to his firm, thin lips. Then he snapped the case of his watch impatiently.

At last, the train came sliding in. Far down its long, wavering length, he made out the golden letters of a name, *Aurora*, the name of Mr. Argyle's car. Brushing aside the thronging, restless crowd, he went striding swiftly down the platform towards the spot where it was bound to halt.

From afar Day, already in the vestibule, saw him coming. As far away as she could see, she took swift note of the old swinging stride, of the proudly poised head. Then her eyes dropped below the level of his shoulders, dropped and remained there, although her face was alight with welcome. For one long minute and for two, she held herself still, unmoved, while she gathered herself together and mustered all her strength to look him in the face. Then, as her eyes lifted, wavered, and lifted once more to meet his own eyes squarely, she gave a little glad outcry and, regardless of the lifelong training which

she had received from her father, before the car had fairly come to a standstill, she cast herself down the steps and landed on Jack's sturdy shoulder.

"Jack, you old darling!" she gasped, midway between tears and laughter. "And after the way you frightened us! It hardly shows at all."

But Jack, for once, had no eyes nor thought for Day. Instinctively, he caught her as she came; but he was seeing one thing only. On the upper step of the car stood Miss Margaret, black-gowned, decorous and smiling; and, just behind Miss Margaret, there stood some one else, her cheeks wet and her arms extended to him.

"Mother!" Jack cried, and, the next instant, he bounded up the steps and caught her in his arms.

Rob, his blue eyes suspiciously pink and his voice bearing in its hoarse note all the symptoms of an incipient cold in the head, lounged out from behind a pillar in time to take Day home. Miss Margaret had been packed into a cab, and the mother and son drove away together in the Argyle carriage. Then, as they turned to walk away, Rob tucked his hand inside Day's arm.

"You worked that game out rather well and won your trick, Day," he said approvingly. "It's a wholly joyous surprise for Jack, and I fancy it will be the last tonic that he needs. Mother has the room opening into his all ready for her. Later, she is to go out to Heatherleigh for a while. After all, though, you must admit that we had somewhat of a joyous

surprise waiting for you at this end. What did you think, when you saw old Jack?"

Day caught her breath sharply.

"Did I imagine it, Rob; or is it really true?"

"True as a die," Rob assured her, as he shouldered his stick. "Of course, it has made hay of his eyebrow, and his forehead isn't exactly pretty on that side of him. Still, his cheek is about all right, and his hair can hide the worst of it, if he doesn't keep it pruned too tight."

Dropping his hand from her arm, Day turned to him abruptly.

"Rob," her voice was impetuous; "I could hug that doctor."

Rob laughed, and his blue eyes, clear and merry, looked straight down into hers, carrying in their gaze a story of such love as rarely falls to the lot of any sister.

"Try me, instead," he bade her gravely.

And then he linked his arm in hers once more.

THE END.

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